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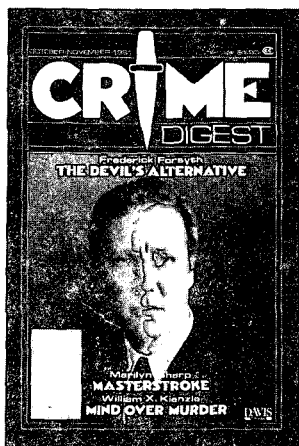


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Dear Reader:

In the first story in this new issue, you will encounter an unusual after-hours office cleaning woman, who in turn encounters some unusual information in her husband's desk drawer. In the nine subsequent stories you'll meet, among others, a professional baseball player, a masseuse, a former

kamikaze pilot, a plumber, an investment counselor, an actress, a movie director, a drug pusher, an armed robber, a jewelry salesman, an adman, plainclothes policemen, hit men. We all have to make a living somehow.

All in all, a healthy cast of characters—healthy in number, at least. How healthy they are physically or emotionally remains to be seen.

Good reading.

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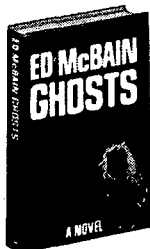
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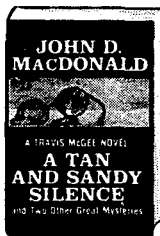
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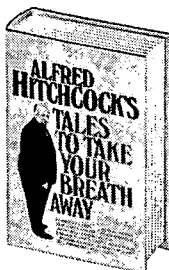
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NEXT
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SHORT STORIES

THE NEW BROOM <i>by Donald Olson</i>	5
WHAT THE HELL <i>by John F. McLaughlin</i>	20
WOOING CHIPS TORTUGA <i>by Ron Goulart</i>	31
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO? <i>by A. E. Schraff</i>	44
FUTURES <i>by Gary Alexander</i>	48
THE DIVINE WIND <i>by Ron Butler</i>	55
PROFESSIONAL COURTESY <i>by Herschel Cozine</i>	73
DEAD SIMPLE <i>by Jeffry Scott</i>	78
OUT OF CIRCULATION <i>by Carl Johnson</i>	91
THE KILLER AND THE CLOWN <i>by Edward D. Hoch</i>	101

MOVIES AND TELEVISION

CRIME ON SCREEN <i>by Peter Christian</i>	120
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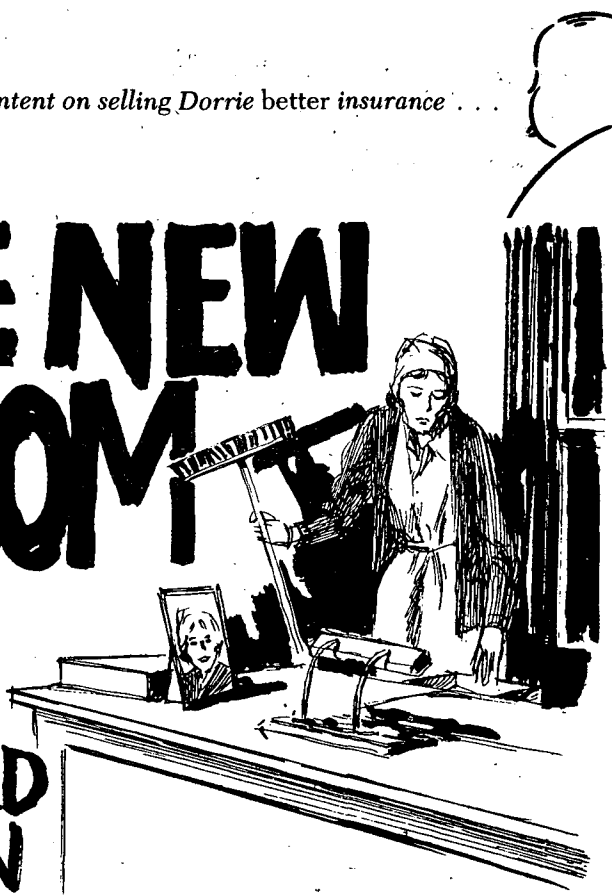
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Her husband was intent on selling Dorrie better insurance . . .

THE NEW BROOM

by
**DONALD
OLSON**



"Jack, it doesn't make any sense." Dorrie Sherwood tried to reason with her husband. "You won't let me get a job to help us get caught up and at the same time you tell me we need more insurance."

He looked at her not as if she were being wilfully obstructive, but patiently, as if she couldn't be expected to understand his superior logic. "Not *more* insurance, buttercup. Better insurance. I'm talking about this new triple-benefit policy the company's just come out with. The mortgage

liquidation clause would be a godsend to you if anything happened to me. And I explained about the accidental-death provision."

"Since I hardly ever get out of the house I'm not likely to be run over by a car," she reminded him.

"No, but I spend nearly as much time in my car as I do at the office."

Dorrie didn't need to be told that. Over the past three months Jack had spent more and more of his evenings calling on clients, leaving her to sit home in front of the TV in their spotless ranch house on Sheridan Drive—a house they couldn't really afford when they bought it and on which they were now having an even rougher time meeting the monthly payments. And why? That's what Dorrie couldn't figure out. Jack's boss, Todd Carver, had always said Jack was one of the hottest salesmen on the Seaboard Mutual roster, yet despite all his extra work and additional commissions they seemed to fall further and further behind.

It might have made some sense to her had Jack's attitude about marital duties been less primitive. She was forbidden to have the slightest say in managing their finances, just as he refrained from interfering in her running of the house. When they were married ten years ago Dorrie had willingly given up her secretarial job to make a home for Jack. She had been wildly in love with the somewhat brash, decidedly handsome, and constantly amusing ex-football player. She was still in love with him, but after ten childless years she'd have welcomed an outside job to keep her from turning into a domestic zombie.

"Honey, you don't know what a joy it is," Jack would say, "to come home to a house as tidy and shining as you keep ours. Especially after the way that so-called cleaning woman does the office. Why Todd doesn't can the lazy hag is beyond me."

Dorrie was able to stifle her frustration as long as Jack remained as lovingly attentive as he used to be and as long as she had no reason to suspect they had financial worries. She had to admit she still couldn't fault him in the lovemaking department—although she had begun to feel that their finest moments were behind them so far as frequency and intensity of ardor were concerned. But when it became inescapably clear that they were on a bumpy road financially his stubborn refusal that she take a job infuriated her.

From the very start of their marriage Jack had been ambitious, and only much later had it become apparent that his drive to succeed was coupled with an impatience that caused him to act rashly. In his deter-

mination to find a shortcut to wealth he had disregarded the limits of his own expertise. He was a whiz at the insurance game but a couple of disastrous flyers in the stock market four years ago had thrown them into monetary panic. He had promised to refrain from any further such forays and to the best of Dorrie's knowledge he had kept his word, but now she wondered.

There was no point in snooping through his desk at home—he kept all financial records, business and domestic, at the office. At last she decided to tackle him squarely on the matter. “Jack, I know you promised you wouldn’t do anything risky again. I mean like playing the market. But you can’t blame me for wondering when I know you’re working longer hours while our finances are getting in more and more of a muddle. And don’t tell me they’re not. Those bill collectors haven’t been phoning to inquire about our health.”

Instead of taking offense, Jack cuddled her in his strong arms and nuzzled the soft brown hair curling around her ear. “Honey, give me more credit than that. I took a bath in the market and learned my lesson. What you don’t understand is that inflation is hurting us as badly as everyone else. That’s all it is. Now stop fretting. We’re doing all right.”

“But, darling, we could do better if you’d only let me—”

“No. That’s out. Absolutely. Your job is keeping house for your old man. You do it splendidly. I couldn’t be more satisfied.”

Had he shown the least inclination to argue she might also have asked why, if things were so perfect, he had recently begun drinking more heavily than usual—a habit that certainly wasn’t helping to balance their budget. Instead, she let the matter drop. If things didn’t improve she felt he’d have no choice but to let her find a job.

And then she had a disturbingly revealing chat with Todd Carver at Seaboard Mutual’s annual Achievement Awards Dinner. At the cocktail party preceding the dinner Todd had drawn her aside and told her he hoped Jack wouldn’t be too disappointed at being left out this year.

“Left out?”

“Of the awards. It’ll be the first year.”

“But, Todd, I don’t understand. Jack’s been working harder than ever. He’s scarcely home more than one or two evenings a week.”

Carver’s gaze drifted away. “Well, you know how it is, Dorrie. Even champions have off-years.”

An evasiveness in his manner troubled her. “Todd, you don’t have to

treat me like a dumb wife even if Jack does. Tell me the truth. Has Jack really been putting out his best effort?"

"Results indicate he's not," Carver admitted.

"But all the extra hours he's been spending—I don't get it."

For a moment or two Carver seemed uncertain whether to speak his mind, but as if in response to Dorrie's earnest look of appeal he said: "Are you sure all those extra hours have been spent drumming up business?"

She was too shocked to reply instantly. He put his hand on her arm. "I didn't mean to alarm you, Dorrie. It may only be a rumor—it probably is—but I've heard Jack's been doing some pretty heavy gambling lately."

"Gambling!" The word burst from her lips. She quickly lowered her voice. "But Jack's never gambled. Oh, I suppose trying his luck in the market was gambling in a sense, but you mean *gambling*?"

"It may all have blown over by now. It was months ago I heard those rumors. There's nothing wrong in a guy getting together with some pals around a card table—I do it myself. But one of the fellows happened to mention that Jack was bragging—remember, this was months ago—about winning big in a poker game downtown."

Dorrie stared at him. "Can you remember exactly when that was?"

"Let's see—somewhere around the first of March I think it was."

About the time Jack had surprised her with the new dishwasher, she recalled. He'd told her he'd earned a big commission by signing up some local business with a group insurance plan.

"Dorrie, Jack's one of my best men. I wouldn't want to see him get in over his head. Maybe if you had a little heart-to-heart chat with him—"

She promised she'd try. "But you know Jack. Frankly, though, I have been worried about money lately. And when you've got as much time on your hands as I have it's natural to worry. If only he'd agree to let me take a job."

He smiled at her woebegone look. "Maybe it's time you asserted yourself. Tell him you're going to work whether he likes it or not."

"I tried that. Once. It was the first time he really blew his stack at me. It's a blind spot with him. He just won't hear of it."

"Well, things being as they are right now you might not be able to find a job anyway."

"I was a good secretary, Todd. And I'm familiar with office procedures."

Why, I'll bet you have girls leaving every so often, don't you? If *you* were to offer me a job Jack might not find it easy to object."

He shook his head. "My dear, I wish I could. But my girls seem content to stay with us. Sally Owens is leaving to have a baby next month, but she's only taking a maternity leave. Of course my own secretary—Bea Menotti—has been throwing hints about leaving one of these days. She's going through a divorce right now and seems to think she'll want a complete change of scene."

"Which one is she?" Dorrie asked, gazing over the crowd.

"Oh, Bea avoids these affairs. She says they bore her. But she's a super secretary."

"So was I. Todd? If she does decide to leave would you give me a crack at the job? If you do I won't let Jack stand in my way."

"I sure will, Dorrie. But right now my only worry is replacing the cleaning woman. Bertha's been falling down on the job to the point where the staff's beginning to rebel."

Dorrie spoke on impulse. "Hire me in her place."

Todd roared. "I don't quite see you as a cleaning woman."

"Jack does," she said drily.

"You're not serious, of course."

"Oh yes I am."

"But, Dorrie, the pay—"

"I don't care. It'll help. And later, if this other position does open up—Todd, don't look at me like that. I *mean* it! I want the job!"

"But Jack would never permit it."

"Does he have to know? Look, he's out almost every evening for hours. I'll tell him I'm taking some classes at the college. Todd, I'm ready to climb the walls. I need something to *do*."

"Well, it's only three hours, five days a week. But if Jack did find out—"

"Then the fat would be in the fire."

"Fait accompli, you mean?" he said.

"Exactly."

"But they'd all know Jack's wife was the new cleaning woman."

"They needn't find out. Tell them my name is—" she searched her mind "—Alice Baker."

Todd clearly found it amusing. "Dorrie, I had no idea you could be so devious."

"Devious nothing. I'm desperate . . ."

To her surprise Jack reacted with very little surprise and even less curiosity when she told him she was enrolling in evening classes at the college. He seemed merely pleased that she wouldn't be left to spend the evenings alone.

Actually, it all worked out more smoothly than she'd expected. Indeed it was a pleasure to clean the small modern suite of offices on Porter Avenue. As she vacuumed and swept, tidied the desks, watered the plants, and washed the windows she dreamed of how nice it would be if the Menotti woman really did quit her job and she herself could become Todd's secretary.

Just let Jack try to stop her.

It was astonishing how quickly even this menial job restored her self-confidence. Moreover, the deception part of it added a spot of fun. Todd had warned her that occasionally one of the salesmen might stop back at the office after hours or one of the girls might now and then work late. It didn't worry Dorrie. As she moved about the suite in her baggy smock, her hair in a bun and covered by a scarf, no makeup on her face and a pair of ancient tinted hornrims on her nose, she felt sure that even the men to whom she'd been introduced at various functions would never connect her to the woman in the photograph on Jack's desk. The picture itself was ten years old. And should Jack himself chance to pop in unexpectedly, she'd take refuge in Todd's office or in the washroom.

Nor did she feel the slightest twinge of guilt when Jack finally alluded to the new cleaning woman one evening at dinner.

"Honey, Todd finally canned old Bertha and hired a new broom. I think she must have taken lessons from you."

"An improvement, is she?"

"That's hardly the word. You know, there were mornings when I'd sit down at my desk and find the ashtray still full of yesterday's butts."

"Have you met her?"

"No, but Gary Maxon said she's a mousy little thing. Works like a beaver and doesn't open her mouth. Not like old Bertha."

Dorrie smiled behind his back. "More coffee, dear?"

"Thanks. Oh, by the way, I'll bring that new policy home tonight for you to sign."

"Jack, let's not take on any more bills for the time being. Not till we get caught up."

"But the premiums aren't that much higher than on our present policy."

"How much higher?"

"Let me worry about that, buttercup."

Dorrie's new confidence asserted itself. "Well, I'll look it over before we decide."

He chuckled. "The only thing you have to decide, hon, is what cuts of meat to buy for your loving spouse's dinner. Leave the rest to me."

"We'll see."

Jack gave her a funny look, then finished his coffee in silence.

The advent of her job coincided, much to Dorrie's pleasure and astonishment, with a change in Jack's attitude, so that she soon began to wonder if indeed she'd been overreacting to their financial predicament. More and more frequently Jack remarked that he didn't have to call on anyone that evening and often she would arrive home, having changed back into her regular clothes at the office, to find him sitting in front of the TV nursing a drink. The obvious conclusion she drew from this was that his gambling fever, had it in fact existed, like his enthusiasm for the stock market had now abated. And yet he betrayed at the same time an even deeper air of preoccupation.

Dorrie would have been deficient in normal curiosity if, while tidying her husband's desk at the office with extra diligence, she hadn't felt the urge to do a bit of discreet snooping. If evidence existed of Jack's extra-curricular activities it would be found in his desk. If he did owe gambling debts this was where he'd keep a record of them. It took her a while, however, to overcome her scruples before actually prying into the desk's contents. The center drawer and file drawer revealed nothing of a personal nature, nor did the top pedestal drawer. The two beneath this one, however, were locked. In a way she felt relieved—while at the same time her curiosity remained alive.

Jack hadn't said a word for days about the new policy he'd brought home—until that evening, very casually, he'd brought it up.

"Honey," he'd said, "I wish you'd sign that policy where I made the X's. No point in putting it off."

"Jack, you said we'd talk about it first."

"No, you said that."

"I'll look it over tonight," she promised. "Then we can discuss it."

This provoked a spark of irritation. "What's to discuss? Just sign the damn thing."

When she did examine the policy she found its language as arcane as a legal brief's, but as she had expected the premiums were considerably higher than those they were presently paying. As were the benefits. When she pointed this out to Jack he merely shrugged and said the superior benefits were well worth the higher cost.

"And how," she asked, "are we going to fit those added costs into our budget?"

He was ready with an answer: "I've thought about that, hon. You're right about my having been hitting the sauce a bit heavily lately. I'll make a deal with you. Sign the policy and I'll make sure our liquor bill is cut in half. You have my word."

Dorrie was elated at the idea. Furthermore, with the money she was squirreling away there was no logical reason why they couldn't afford the higher insurance premiums. She signed the policy. Jack didn't exactly utter whoops of joy but his hugs and kisses and air of vast relief seemed to Dorrie a trifle extravagant. "You won't be sorry, sweetheart," he assured her. "It's the wisest thing you've ever done."

It was only later, while going about her duties at the insurance office, that Dorrie was struck by an alarming thought. Jack's persistence in urging her to sign the new policy, his exuberant delight when she did, suddenly brought to mind what he had said when he first mentioned the policy: *The mortgage liquidation clause would be a godsend to you if anything happened to me. And I explained about the accidental-death provision.*

She stopped in the midst of polishing the water-fountain bowl. "You won't be sorry, sweetheart—it's the wisest thing you ever did." Jack's words suddenly assumed a morbid, frightening implication, and she was so shocked she cried out aloud.

"Anything wrong, Alice? Did you call me?"

For a moment Dorrie had forgotten that Todd's secretary, Mrs. Menotti, was working late in Todd's office. She shook her head as the attractive brunette came to the office door. "I'm sorry, I was just thinking out loud."

She resumed her work with an air of nervous haste. It was absurd, of course. It had to be. She was making something out of nothing. Jack was hardly the type, no matter what sort of bind he might be in, to consider any such drastic solution to his dilemma. And though his manner lately had been preoccupied it was by no means suicidal. She tried to put the notion out of her mind, and yet when she went to tidy Jack's desk she couldn't keep her gaze from returning to the two locked drawers . . .

That evening she remarked to Jack that she wondered if he hadn't been working a bit too hard.

"What makes you say that?"

"You've been so preoccupied lately."

"Old age creeping up," he quipped. "Not the old gung-ho Jack you married."

"How much more gung can you ho without having a breakdown or something?"

"I feel fine, buttercup."

"You've admitted you're having trouble sleeping."

"I've got a lot on my mind. And don't worry—I finally did what you suggested. Doc Bemus gave me a prescription for sleeping pills. I'm picking it up tomorrow."

That Jack should admit he needed something to help him sleep only revived Dorrie's morbid thoughts.

"Darling, you'd tell me if anything was bothering you, wouldn't you?"

Did she really detect a faint flash of alarm in his response? "Bothering me? You're imagining things."

"But you would tell me?"

His smile seemed forced. "You know I would."

Dorrie was now determined to check the contents of those drawers in Jack's desk and at the first opportunity she did something about it. Saturday was Jack's day to sleep in and long before he awoke Dorrie had taken the ring of keys from the bureau, driven into town and had duplicates made of those she thought most likely to open the locked drawers.

Now that she'd gone this far, Dorrie couldn't wait until Monday night when, to her dismay, the presence of one of the salesmen thwarted her intentions. That Bea Menotti was also again working late wouldn't have mattered too much. From Todd's office she couldn't have seen Dorrie unlock the drawers. But the salesman's desk was in the same room as Jack's. When he took a coffee break he invited Mrs. Menotti and Dorrie to join him.

Dorrie declined and went on with her work while Bea and the salesman sat together drinking coffee and exchanging office gossip.

"Then the rumors are true?" Dorrie heard the salesman inquire.

Bea Menotti sighed. "About my leaving? It looks that way."

"You sure you're doing the right thing?"

"Who knows? I just feel it would be best to make a clean break with everything. Now that my decree is final."

A week earlier Dorrie would have rejoiced at the news. To become Todd Carver's secretary was the job she wanted and Todd had as much as promised her first chance at it. But now, obsessed with uncertainty about Jack's intentions, she could take little satisfaction in the prospect.

Fortunately, the office was empty the following night and Dorrie lost no time in unlocking the drawers in Jack's desk. The top drawer contained, among its other contents, the confirmation of her worst fears: she came upon a bundle of copies of IOU's amounting to several thousand dollars, all made out to a man named Jake Dispenza at a place called the Sportsmen's Club. They were dated several months previously.

She continued her search, hoping she wouldn't discover any more recent IOU's, which might at least indicate Jack had once more learned his lesson, while at the same time she was even more inclined to believe he might have felt there was no way out of his predicament but—she loathed even to think the word—suicide.

What she came upon in the bottom drawer, however, was something so infinitely more horrifying that she couldn't keep from trembling as she read two handwritten letters marked PERSONAL.

The first one said: "My darling Jack, These last few nights have been sheer agony. I know you were right in saying we mustn't see each other again until it's all over, but I must at least write to you. You say you haven't been able to sleep from thinking about it. Neither have I. Oh, I wish it were over. I know there's no other way—I've accepted that, just as you have—it's the only way you can solve the money problem and at the same time be free of her as soon as possible. We must be brave, darling, and think only of our future together. But for God's sake, you *must* get her to sign that policy!" The letter was signed simply and enigmatically—and cautiously—"Me."

Total disbelief had turned into mind-numbing shock by the time Dorrie turned to the second letter, dated two weeks later:

"Beloved, I congratulate you! How clever you were to make her that promise about cutting down on the liquor if she would sign the policy. But oh, lover, how am I going to get through the next sixty days? Why must there be such a long waiting period before the policy takes effect? Not to hold you in my arms again for two whole months! But I know I

must be patient. And that I must settle for the sound of your voice even though I know you're right that we must be careful even about this."

Dorrie shoved the letters back where they were and relocked the drawer. For minutes she couldn't rise from Jack's chair. She cradled her head on her arms and wept. It was still almost more than her mind could grasp.

Not suicide. Murder. *Jack was planning to murder her.*

He wants me dead. He wants me dead. The words kept repeating themselves in her brain. My husband wants me dead so he can have another woman. And money. And abruptly, with sudden vivid clarity, this knowledge of his perfidy, this glimpse into the reality of his character, brought with it a realization that their lives together had been nothing but a sham for weeks—months—maybe even years. She was filled with self-loathing at having deluded herself that she still cared as much about him as she ever had.

Not until hours later, as she lay wide-eyed in her bed alongside Jack's did the problem of how she should handle this bizarre and devastating knowledge enter her mind. In sixty days—less than sixty days now—she was to be condemned to death. Oh, it was all so incredible!

Yet to her astonishment she found it almost easy to behave as if she hadn't made this dreadful discovery, and this made her realize how like two polite strangers she and Jack had become. Each night now she unlocked that bottom drawer, but not until several nights later did she find another letter. Her fingers scarcely trembled at all now. A sort of malicious glee filled her mind at knowing how Jack's months of deceit were being repaid in kind.

"Dearest J., I promise I won't write again. It is imprudent, I agree, but oh, sweetheart, if you only knew what torture it is not to feel your arms around me. The night of October 26th will be perfect. How convenient that Dorrie—how I've come to hate even her name—is such a creature of habit. And a fall in the bathtub is a marvelous idea. I wish I could help in a more direct way than in just providing you with an alibi. I'll be waiting for you, lover. For you and the champagne you promised. A toast to our success and a kiss to speed you on your way. I'll swear you were with me until midnight. No one will know you slipped away home for half an hour."

To know the precise date, almost the exact hour, when Jack planned for her to have an accident produced almost a comforting effect on Dorrie.

Her only regret was that she hadn't discovered the letters—or the existence of another woman—while Jack was still keeping his trysts with her. Then she could have followed him, found out the woman's identity. Not that it mattered. That she *did* exist was knowledge enough. Now, however, Dorrie was obliged to make some decision as to what she must do.

At first it seemed simple. Go to the police with copies of the letters, tell them the whole sordid story, and let them act accordingly. And yet curious things had been happening in Dorrie's mind since discovering the truth. Fear had given way to indignation, and indignation to outrage. What satisfaction was there in knowing that Jack, the monster, would land in jail—yes, and the woman too—when she herself would really be the one to suffer? Public disgrace, notoriety, and nothing to compensate her for it all but poverty, a heap of debts, the loss of her home perhaps.

Still, what was the alternative? What else could she do but go to the police? She wished she had someone in whom she could confide. Her parents were both dead, her only sister lived three thousand miles away, she was on no more than speaking terms with their neighbors, and she had no close women friends. Certainly none close enough in whom to confide this horror.

Her job at the office was a blessing now. The fewer moments she had to spend in Jack's company, struggling to maintain a show of ignorance and normality, the better. While engaged in her cleaning tasks she could relax somewhat. And so she failed to realize that anyone might notice a change in her until, as she was finishing up one evening, Bea Menotti surprised her by asking what was wrong.

"You've looked awfully down in the mouth lately, Alice."

Without forethought Dorrie responded to the other woman's friendly concern: "How would you feel if you found out your husband was having an affair with another woman?"

"Oh. Oh. Is that the problem?"

"That's part of it."

Bea pulled the pencil from her chignon and pointed it at Dorrie. "I guess you know how *I* solved the problem."

"You mean that's why you got a divorce?"

"It sure is."

"But it's different with you. You've got a good job. You can support yourself."

"You're right. I guess if I'd been one of these poor drab souls who had all their lives wrapped up in their hubbies I don't know what I'd have done. On second thought, I do know what I'd have done. I'd have bought myself a gun and shot him."

"Now you're joking."

"Am I?"

Perhaps if Bea Menotti hadn't made that remark, seriously or not, Dorrie would never have contemplated so drastic a means of righting the injustice Jack had done her. Indeed, even if she had considered it she would likely have put it out of her mind had not another discovery provided a catalyst that set her on the course to murder. When it happened it happened suddenly—so suddenly she responded almost mechanically. Until the very moment she opened Jack's desk drawer on the evening of the 24th she truly believed herself capable of no other action than to go to the police. She had already made copies of the letters on the office copier and had decided to tell her story on the 26th. When Jack came back to the house from his alibi rendezvous the cops would be waiting for him.

But as it happened she did open the drawer and found not another letter but a bottle of expensive champagne. It had to be the champagne referred to in the earlier letter—the one with which the precious pair meant to celebrate her impending demise.

Without any clearly conscious intent she bought an identical bottle, and on the afternoon of the 25th she carefully removed the foil and cork and dissolved in the bottle's contents all the sleeping capsules left in Jack's vial, knowing that for several nights now he hadn't been taking them. She wasn't at all certain they'd have the desired effect, or that Jack and his lover would consume the entire bottle, although knowing Jack she couldn't believe he would settle for one toast. She couldn't even be sure she was doing it with any definite intention of committing murder. It might simply be a gesture, a symbolic action.

"Darling," said Jack as they were finishing dinner on the evening of the 26th, "I'm going down to the office to spend a few hours getting my quarterly report in shape. I may not be home until close to midnight."

The office! Oh, yes, my dear husband, thought Dorrie, I know how hard you're going to be working at the office.

Was he really such a dope he thought she'd believe he'd go back to the office on a Saturday night?

"Fine, dear," she replied. "I'll watch TV, take my bath, and hop into bed."

"Give me a kiss, sweetheart," he said, "in case you're asleep when I get home."

If you get home, my darling, she said to herself. And if you do you won't find me in bed—or in the tub.

She found herself surprisingly free of nerves as she sat watching TV until seven-thirty. Then she got in the car and went for a long drive, copies of the incriminating letters in her bag. If she returned later and found Jack's car at the house she would drive straight to the police station.

When she ventured to return home shortly after midnight the house was dark and the garage empty. She went inside but didn't undress or lie down.

She sat waiting for the phone to ring.

At nine o'clock in the morning she was roused, not by the phone, but by the sound of the door chimes.

She rose groggily and went to the door.

"Todd!"

He stood there, bleak-eyed in the morning light.

"May I come in, Dorrie? I'm afraid I have some very bad news for you."

He stood facing her in the living room.

She tried to show alarm. "Todd, I've been so worried. Jack didn't come home all night."

"That's why I'm here," he said gently, reaching for her hand. "You'd better sit down, Dorrie. I'm so sorry, my dear. Jack is dead."

She worked her lips, but said nothing. How could Todd have found out so soon?

"Ben McEvoy stopped at the office on his way to church to pick up some papers. He found Jack."

Her astonishment wasn't feigned.

"At the office?"

"Jack told me he was going to be working at the office on reports Saturday night. The police aren't positive what happened. They found

an empty bottle of champagne. There were no signs of violence on the bodies."

"Bodies?"

"Jack's. And Bea Menotti's. They're both dead. I knew Bea had agreed to help Jack last night."

He ran a hand through his thinning hair. "God, it's all so incredible. It makes no sense at all."

Jack and Bea Menotti. Dorrie tried to take it in, but it was so unexpected; totally staggering.

And as the first wave of hysteria built within her one insane thought drove all others from her mind: *I'd better start polishing up my shorthand.*



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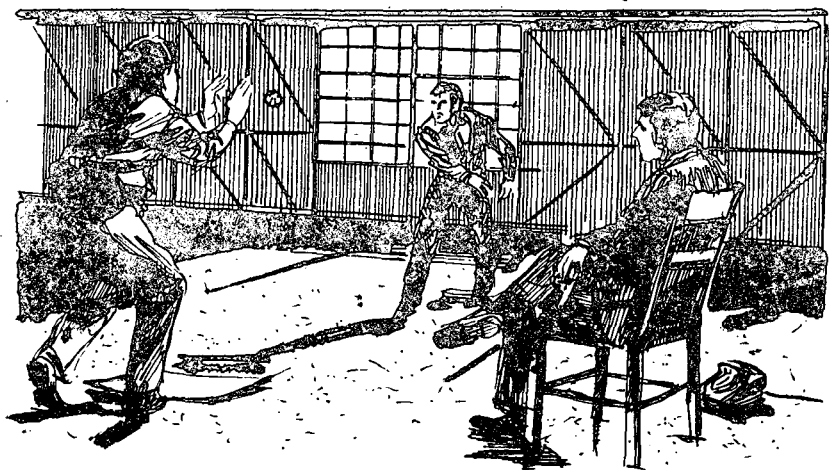
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To the kidnapped baseball star they were Butch, Skinny, and Boss

WHAT THE HELL

by JOHN F. McLAUGHLIN



I am happy like bird when I drive up to loading platform of laundry on that Tuesday morning. What the hell? In my pocket is tickets for first two games of World Series, which start tomorrow! And Series to be held only mile from where I live since we move here from P.R. three year ago. First, Sox they tie for American League pennant, then they beat Royals in playoff, now they play Pittsburgh Pirates for World Champions! No wonder everybody in city go wild!

We crazy-excited. Everybody march nearly all night after playoff game. Sure, we drink lots beer, raise a little hell, smash few windows maybe. One thing though. We don't hassle no cops. They don't hardly bust nobody. Most of them just stand around with grins on their face. Why not? They happy just like us. But before we begin march, lots of us rush over to ballpark to buy tickets when they first put on sale. I buy tickets for first two games, which they play here in city.

All of us damn sure we beat them Pirates. We got big stickers like Bellamy and Roche, and we got best damn pitcher in all baseball—Tabby Katz. So what the hell?

When I hop off truck after morning pickup I humming and whistling like you do when you glad and excited at same time. I go round to back of truck to unload, but Charlie, the super, he come out and stop me. He say, "Mr. Lucas want to see you right away." I starts to ask why, but he give a jerk of his big head, so I move.

I knock at office door which say *George V. Lucas—Private*. Mr. Lucas yell, "Come in, Arturo," even before he see me. That just like Mr. Lucas. He know everything going down all the time. He big man in laundry business, but he do real good in couple things he have going on side. Sometime he ask we guys in laundry to help out on some jobs. He pay us double-overtime, so what the hell?

Mr. Lucas I like. He very nice guy so long you do what he tell you. When I go inside his office, he sitting behind big desk with two telephones on it. He have big smile on face, but not in eyes. They kind of squinty behind thick glasses, and they make you feel scary, you know? And I even more nervous because Leo, the big stupid ox, he standing behind Mr. Lucas' chair. Leo big and strong and mean as they come. I been on a couple jobs with him, but he no friend of mine. He get kick out of bashing guys around, like say they don't pay up on time or something. O.K., they got it coming, but Leo go out of way to lean on them, you know? But Mr. Lucas, he like Leo and he use him a lot. Leo good muscle and he do like Mr. Lucas say.

Mr. Lucas say in polite way, "Sit down, Arturo. I think I got little job that might interest you. One that could pay off nice for you and Leo." Right away I see I got problem here. Mr. Lucas already promise me two afternoons off to go to Series. What if he want me to work out of town during games? Nobody don't never say no to Mr. Lucas.

So I say, "Sure, Mr. Lucas. Anything you say."

Then he surprise me. "Arturo, what you think about Tabby Katz?"

What I think about Tabby? I couldn't hardly get the words out fast enough.

"Mr. Lucas, I seen almost every home game Sox play and I say Tabby greatest pitcher alive. He have ERA 1.37, he win twenty-six and lose only four, and he sure as hell win Series for us! He pitch first game tomorrow, he sure take that one, then he probably pitch third game, and maybe fifth—he make them all cinch games for us. Sure, Mr. Lucas, we got Roche and Bellamy—they terrific with bat—but Tabby, he'll beat Pittsburgh all by himself. Wow, when Tabby pitch—"

Mr. Lucas cut me off. "Exactly, my boy. But suppose something—er—happens to him so that he can't play. What then?"

I laugh. "Oh, don't worry none about anything happening to Tabby, Mr. Lucas. Sportwriters guys, they call him Iron Man. He always keep in good shape. He even jog to ballpark every home game. That four-five mile. Beside that—"

"Yeah, sure, Arturo," Mr. Lucas say. "The point is, he very necessary, and I'm sure everyone feel the same way. How about you, Leo?"

"Sure, boss," say Leo. The big slob don't know a fastball from a slider. But what the hell?

"So, as Tabby goes, so goes the Sox chances." Mr. Lucas smile a little. "You could say that Tabby Katz is indispensable."

I don't know what that word mean, but I say, "Sure, Mr. Lucas, you bet! But you big Sox fan too, huh?"

"Of course I am, Arturo. I live in the city, don't I? And I do business here, don't I? Sure I want the Sox to win—but I can't afford to mix pleasure with profit." He get up and go to window, looking out at Charlie unloading my truck. "Arturo, if I have my way Tabby Katz will be out of commission for a while."

I jump up and my mouth yank open, but nothing come out. "Now, don't worry, my boy," say Mr. Lucas. "It should only be for a day or two. Abner Hardy, the Sox owner, should do anything to get his superstar back—once we have him under wraps."

"You—you mean you going to hijack him?" I couldn't hardly think straight no more.

Mr. Lucas smile again. "You might say that. And I'm asking you to play along. You and Leo will make the snatch and hide Katz out. I'll take care

of the rest of the deal. It should be a piece of cake—I planned the whole thing even before the playoff. Well, what you say? You in?”

Like I say, nobody don’t never say no to Mr. Lucas, and I hear myself saying, “Sure, Mr. Lucas. Anything you say.” Then I get up nerve a little. “But why pick me? I mean, they’s plenty good boys around who don’t care nothing about baseball.”

He just say, “Yeah, they’s plenty boys, all right, but I pick you. First, I can depend on you to do exactly like I say. Next, you’re a baseball pitcher yourself.” (Is true. I good pitcher on lousy Park League team, the Olympic All-Stars.) “And you a dyed-in-wool fan of Katz and the Sox, so I know you’ll look after him. I don’t want no soiled goods. Leo here is one of my best boys, but sometimes he gets a little out of line. On this job you might say Leo is the enforcer, and you’re the—uh—caretaker. You both got that? I hold each of you responsible for Katz’s condition. Leo only get tough as a last resort.”

I guess I look kinda down because he say, “Cheer up, Arturo. Look on bright side. You get to spend some time with you hero—you get to know him real good. Who knows? He might even give you few pointers.”

He go back and sit at desk. “And get this—this job carries bonus. Right after snatch is settled you and Leo get a long free vacation in California.”

Three hours after leaving Mr. Lucas’ office me and Leo is sitting in a hot Dodge parked on Edgehill Road, halfway between ballpark and Tabby’s condo. Like I say, Tabby always jog to park. I seen him do this few times before, but I always chicken out before I can ask him for autograph, which I like to have very much. And now—

“That him?” ask Leo.

I say, “It him,” and Leo get out of car and stand behind it. I get out on street side, and like Mr. Lucas tell me I look all around. Only one I see is old lady watering flowers in a bucket on front lawn. Then I step on sidewalk, where Tabby coming along fast. “Hi, Mr. Katz,” I say, holding out pen and paper, “give me autograph, please?”

Tabby either have to stop or run into me. He say, “Get the hell out of my way,” or something like that, but I still stand there like I blocking home plate. Then Leo step out from back of car. His hand so big you can’t hardly see the .38 he hold in it.

“All right, Buster,” he say. “No noise. Get in back seat quick.”

Tabby, he keep his cool. He say, “This lousy gag. Tell boys in locker

room it didn't wash. Now, one side!" He look like he gonna start running again.

"Please, Tabby," I say, "do like he say." At first it look like Tabby think about taking Leo. Tabby, he six-two, but Leo even bigger, and the piece in his hand and the mean look on his face make pretty scary scene. After a couple seconds, Tabby get message and into back seat. Leo get in after him. He give gun to me and blindfold Tabby like Mr. Lucas tell him. Then I get into driver's seat and we buzz off. The old woman ain't seen nothing—she still watering flowers—and they not a car in sight.

Half hour later I pull into McWharton's parking lot in South Side. McWharton's is big warehouse Mr. Lucas own under other name. It look like it been closed for couple years, but me and Leo know this ain't so because we been here some nights storing things for Mr. Lucas. Warehouse is five stories high. All windows have thick shutters and all the doors is padlocked. Across the street is other empty warehouse but it so old it falling apart. Both sides of McWharton's is vacant lots; full of junk and garbage and stuff. Even on afternoon when everybody in city is crazy-excited is no signs of life on street—it dead like cemetery. Mr. Lucas sure know how to pick his spots.

I drive Dodge to in back of warehouse where we blocked off by high wood fence. Then I get out, unlock padlock, and open door. Leo and Tabby gets out and Leo pushes Tabby through doorway. I close door behind them and then snap on padlock. I drive car to shopping center three-four miles away and ditch Dodge after taking care of fingerprints like Mr. Lucas told me.

In about hour I hike all the way back to McWharton's, take quick look around, then slip through basement window Leo leave open for me before he go upstairs. I shut window and lock it and climb to third floor where I know Leo's taken Tabby. Both me and Leo know our way around warehouse. In one corner of third floor is big office with two small ones leading off. One office, only one with door, have cot in it. This where Mr. Lucas say Tabby is to spend night. Other small office fixed up like kitchen and there is toilet off that. Because all windows have steel shutters in front of them warehouse pretty dark—only light is few bulbs in ceiling.

Leo, he sitting behind big desk which have small radio and telephone on it. Sitting on couch in corner is Tabby, his head bowed down and his hands on sides of face. He look mad and sad at same time. Like Mr. Lucas

tell us, I call Leo Butch and he call me Skinny in front of Tabby. I say, "Hi, Butch, how everything going?"

Leo say, "What the hell take you so long, Skinny? Beat it into kitchen and fix some chow."

I say, "O.K., Butch," and go into next room which have fridge, sink, stove, and shelve with pans and cans and things on them. I get things started and go back to office when I hear phone ring. Leo is talking on phone. He careful to call Mr. Lucas Boss, so Tabby won't know real name.

When he hang up, Leo say Boss has called up Sox owner, Mr. Hardy, and tell him he holding Tabby for ransom, but not to call police. He tell him he call him again later. When Tabby hear Leo telling this, he just sit quiet, shaking head.

I fix supper of canned beans and bread, cookies and coffee. At first Leo don't want to give nothing to Tabby, but I remind him of Boss's orders to keep Tabby in good shape and give Tabby a plateful too. After we eat we listen to six o'clock news and you never hear such excitement about Tabby being missing. Some news guys think he might of blanked out, some think he might of been grabbed by Pittsburgh fans—all kinds wild things. The last one to see Tabby was wife when he leave his condo. Nobody didn't mention about Mr. Hardy getting phone call, so I guess he don't tell no one. I pray to myself that when time come, Mr. Hardy pay off so Tabby can start in Series tomorrow. The only thing Tabby say is, "That tightwad Hardy won't pay a cent even if it mean the Series."

Leo pipe up, "Look, Buster, you better start praying, because if that dude don't come across you dogmeat," and he pat his .38.

I say, "Aw, come on, Butch, leave the guy alone," but Leo just laugh, or come as near to laugh as he can.

We listen to more stuff on radio for a couple hours or so, but in the news nobody don't really know nothing about what's with Tabby. After a while, Leo say, "All right, Katz. Bedtime." Then he toss me a roll of tape and tell me to tape Tabby's hands behind him.

I say, "Hey, Butch. Why tape him up? You hurt his arms or hands that way. Look, he going to be in locked room with no windows, right? And either me or you is going to be outside room with gun in our hands, right?"

Leo say, "Skinny, you too damn soft for this job," but he push Tabby, without tape, into room and lock door.

Leo and me split up guard that night. I stay up first, then take Leo's

place on couch in corner. When I wake up I smell bacon, eggs, and coffee cooking. When I walk out to kitchen, I find Leo only making chow for two, so I remind him what Mr. Lucas say about taking care of Tabby. Leo swear, but he put on another plate. Then he leave Tabby out of locked room and him and Tabby sit down at desk and eat while I stand with piece in my hand until they through. Then I eat. All this time, radio on. They's other news but Tabby steal show. It seem like everybody looking for him but no one don't know where to look. Mr. Hardy must of been real clam. The Sox, they will start Johnny Meade, their second-best pitcher. He good, but he ain't no Tabby Katz. During all this time Tabby don't say nothing but you can tell he got lot on mind.

Mr. Lucas, he call Leo to see how things going. He say he make price a hundred grand and he tell Mr. Hardy later where to make drop. He also tell Mr. Hardy if he bring in cops nobody ever see Tabby alive again. When Leo tell us this part he have big grin on face and he pretend to polish gun with sleeve of sweater. But Tabby, he don't scare easy. He say Mr. Hardy probably pay but he'll try to take it off his salary. "But what good will I be on mound when he does come across?" he say. "A pitcher got to get in plenty throwing practice to be in shape for game. You got anyplace here where I can practice throwing some stuff?"

Leo snarl at him like dog or something. "You nuts? Too damn bad about you! For all I care you can take your arm and—"

But I butts in with, "Look, Butch. I pitcher myself, what the hell you care if he get a little practice? We all sick of just sitting around. And remember what Boss say about taking care of Tabby. You know Boss don't liked to be crossed." Leo, he just grunt, which is almost like go-ahead sign.

Tabby say to me, "Hey, Skinny. You know where you can pick up any baseballs?"

I say, "Maybe. Hey, Butch, we better stock in more groceries—no telling how long we gonna be here. I think I better split." Leo, he don't like idea but he know we gotta eat, so I run downstairs and leave by window in basement.

Nobody ain't in sight in whole crummy neighborhood, but I climb fence and sneak into next street over. Like Mr. Lucas say, you can't never tell when someone might be snooping from some house, even though this side of warehouse pretty dead. On other side, street pretty busy so I stick

to this side. I keep going up and down streets till pretty soon I come to supermarket.

Across street is playground. Since we cinch Series, kids playing baseball everywhere, all day. I see two games over there. One is scrub game, but other game kids have uniforms and whole bit. I go into store and buy groceries, which I put in cardboard box, then I walk across street and go up to bald-headed guy in charge and ask if he got some gloves and baseballs for sale. He say, "What the hell is this? Beat it!" I hold up two tickets for today's game—they no good to me now. He grab them and look them over and say, "Come over to car."

In trunk he have some new baseballs and some used gloves. He give me four balls and a couple gloves. He still got big bargain. I put stuff in bottom of grocery box and walk back to McWharton's same way I come, going up and down different streets just in case.

When I reach warehouse I slide in through window, lock it behind me, and climb to third floor. Tabby and Leo, they listening to radio. Lots news about Tabby being missing, but some radio guys now talking about game, which starts soon. Some guys think there been a snatch but Mr. Hardy, he tell them he don't know what they talking about. Tabby's wife say she ain't heard from Tabby or nobody else. After I show Tabby and Leo the balls and gloves I trade for, we eat some ham sandwiches.

Pretty soon game come on radio. Sox are way off. They all worried about what happen to Tabby, I guess. They start with Meade, but then they have to put in a couple relievers. Bellamy and Roche come through with homers, but Sox end up losing it, 12-4.

During game Tabby come to life, yelling and getting up and moving around room. Leo yell at him to shut up and sit down. "Look, Katz," he say, "don't try to pull nothing funny. This ain't no toy I got in my hand and Skinny will tell you I know how to use it."

Just then Mr. Lucas call up. He say Mr. Hardy still stalling but he ain't told cops nothing. Mr. Hardy tell Mr. Lucas he want proof Tabby O.K. before he drop off any bread. Mr. Lucas tell Leo he want to make tape of Tabby saying he all right so far so he can play tape back over phone to Mr. Hardy. Tabby tell Leo he make tape without no trouble if Leo let him warm up—his arm getting stiff. Leo say maybe tomorrow, so Tabby make tape over phone for Mr. Lucas, saying he O.K. and he being treated O.K. and he hope Mr. Hardy pay up quick so he can play in Series.

We eat some more beans I cook, then listen to radio about game and

big city-wide search being made for Tabby. Hell, we ain't even nervous. After a while Leo say we gotta turn in—even though windows are shuttered some light may leak out when it get dark. Leo, he may be stupid but he ain't no fool neither.

Next morning Leo cook eggs and sausages, and when we get through eating Tabby start to do all kinds bends and stretches. Leo never take his eyes or his .38 off of him. Then Tabby start talking real friendly to me about being pitcher. He say, "Skinny, you want me to autograph some of them balls you got yesterday?" Do I? They's only one answer to that, so I get the baseballs and a pen. Tabby say, "What you want me to write?"

I say, "Just write 'From one pitcher to another. Tabby Katz.'" I almost give him my name but remember what Mr. Lucas tell us just in time.

Tabby say to Leo, "What about you, Butch?"

Leo say, "You crazy, man?"

Tabby say to me, "They's still three balls left. You got any friends?"

I say, "Yeah, but don't write no names. Write 'To a pal' or something." So Tabby write something on all the balls till they all autographed.

Then Tabby say to Leo, "Suppose Hardy does pay off? I could be pitching this afternoon. How about letting me do some warmup practice with Skinny?"

I say, "Yeah, how about it, Leo?" Well, we all starting to feel cooped up, and I guess Leo knew he still had big edge and nothing to worry about so he say, "O.K., Buster, but any funny stuff and I'll drill you through both arms. Get the message?"

Tabby say, "You think I nuts or something? All I going to try is pitching arm." So we all leave the office—first me, then Tabby, then Leo. I carry radio and telephone so we can jack it in. Tabby carry balls and gloves and three guesses what Leo carrying.

The third floor, it broke up into little storerooms, so Tabby say, "How about going upstairs?" Leo jerk his head in direction of stairway and we climb up. We see this is it—fourth floor about size of a half a football field and almost all empty. Some bulbs high up in ceiling light the place up.

I pace off distance, find board for Tabby to use for a rubber, and make home plate from some cardboard I find in a corner. Leo find an old chair someplace, drags it near a telephone jack, which he plugs in, and then tilts back, still holding .38 in his hand.

Then I get the baseballs, put on one of gloves, and crouch behind plate.

Tabby plops over a few, then stops and looks at Leo. "Butch," he say, "I want to thank you for letting me practice here but how's about doing me another little favor?"

Leo growl, "Don't push your luck, Buster."

"I can't see plate so good," say Tabby. "How about opening shutter back of plate?"

Leo getting mad. "No more favors, Katz. Open shutter? What the hell you take me for?"

I put in my dime's worth. "Come on, Butch. Open shutter like the man say. A pitcher got to see plate very clear. What can happen? He can't jump out, way up here. Even if he tried you could plug him. He can't yell. They ain't nobody gonna hear him through glass window. And nobody can't see in here if we turn out lights. Beside, I ain't seen nobody in this crummy neighborhood since we been here."

"O.K.," say Leo. "But if Boss get teed off I point the finger right at you."

"O.K., O.K.," I say. "They's chance Tabby might pitch today and he gotta be ready. I take all the blame. O.K.?"

Leo didn't answer nothing, so I turn off lights, open window behind home plate, and push out shutters. They click into place and I close window. Now is plenty light.

Now Tabby really start to burn them in—you never seen such a collection of curves and fastballs. One or two get away from me and go rolling around floor. Then Tabby say, "Look, Skinny—you really want to be big help? Give me signals. Point three fingers up, I give you high fast ball. Point three fingers down, I give you low slide. Wiggle two fingers, I throw you screwball." I start by signaling for a slider, and it come over, just nicking edge of plate. I look ball over like they do in big leagues and throw it back to him.

The next pitch I signal for is inside curve—right over plate. Then I put three-fingers up. Tabby winds and throws. This best pitcher in world and I can see he put everything into it. It straight but high. I don't even try to field it.

And ball crashes through window at ninety miles an hour!

Sound of crash seem to last a long time. Leo jump to feet, his hand tightening on piece, and yell at me to pull shutters back in front of broken window. Then he switch on lights and look hard at Tabby. Tabby say he sorry about broken window—ball got away from him. He tell Leo his arm

starting to feel great, he like to keep throwing. He say he want to taper off with little light workout and promise he won't throw hard no more. Leo grunts but he go back to chair and sit down. What the hell? They's nothing going down.

Tabby, he take it easier now, and after we play catch for about an hour Leo stand up and say, "Knock it off—we gonna go down and eat."

We pick up our stuff and start to move toward stairway, which is down back, when we hear voice down by the stairway, "This is police! Hold everything right there!"

Leo aim his .38 in general direction and sure could of done damage. Tabby, who is in front of him, wheels around and dusts him off with a beanball that graze his temple. Leo go down like he been shot and his gun clatter along the cement floor. The cops come running up and one grab me and start pushing me toward stairs.

"Wait a minute," Tabby say, "nothing gonna happen to this kid. He knew what I wrote on autographed ball that brought you here. He help me all along. He help me get window unshuttered so I could throw message out. That ball had a lot of speed on it—it must of landed in next street over."

"That right," cop say. "A kid find it, read it, and turn it in. We see name of warehouse and your signature. But we gotta bring this kid in—we want to find out who behind snatch so we can nab him."

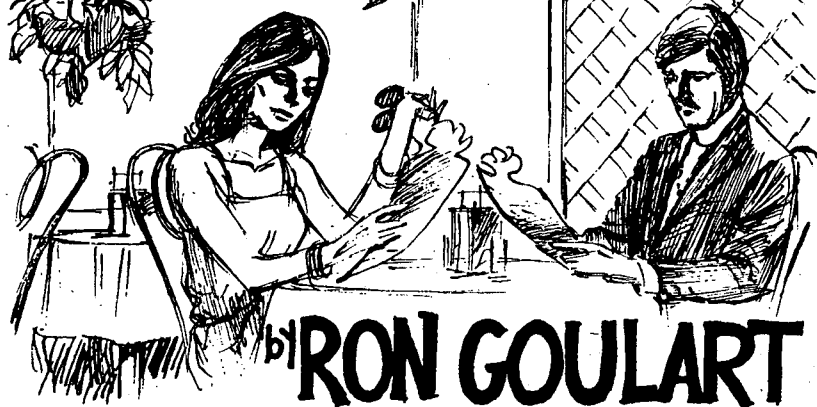
"Ask King Kong here," say Tabby. Leo is sitting up now, rubbing his head. Tabby pushes cop aside and puts arm around my shoulder. "Come on, Skinny," he say. "The game starts in an hour and a half and you want to be cleaned up when you watch it from Mr. Hardy's box." The cops try to argue but how you gonna win with big hero like Tabby?

I do watch game with Mr. Hardy and see Tabby pitch a two-hitter. But you can't win them all and like everybody know we lose the Series 4-3. Too bad Tabby didn't pitch first game.

Everybody also know that Leo sing and him and Mr. Lucas get sent down. Me? I gotta stay in Youth Services for a while, where I write this. In my pocket is letter from Tabby inviting me to be guest in his house in Florida during spring training. I guess he appreciate me writing warehouse name on baseballs. But I can't get Mr. Lucas off my mind. He nice guy, you know what I'm trying to say? Too bad he working in somebody else's laundry now.

Love pushes people into strange corners . . .

WOONG CHIPS TORTUGA



by **RON GOULART**

They never did find all of her.

But they found enough, along with a few fragments of a parcel of explosives, to convince them Sheena Mayday was responsible for blowing up that majestic old steamboat as well as her chief rival. Neither the Sacramento police nor the Hollywood studio executives could plausibly explain why Sheena had set as many as three explosions aboard the *River*

Belle, but they finally wrote that off to temporary insanity. As it was, they missed noticing a fourth explosive charge entirely.

Since I know what really took place up there on that little tributary of the Sacramento River and since Sheena was a good friend of mine, I was, for a short while anyway, tempted to speak out. Actually, she wasn't a murderess and she *didn't* cause the explosion of that authentic riverboat being used in the filming of *Plantation Fury*. But since speaking up would only antagonize quite a few people, silence seemed best. And being thought a murderess has given Sheena's popularity a tremendous, though unfortunately final, boost. Two of her earlier movies were run the other night on KWOW-TV and her poster of two seasons ago is selling impressively again.

Sheena talked about that poster the last time I saw her alive. She'd come back to L.A. from the Sacramento location to do a new Pantz commercial for my advertising agency. During a break in the shooting she and I went out for a late lunch at a favorite place of hers, a vegetarian spot on La Cienega called Eats of Eden.

"Notice that?" she asked as we walked through the near-empty restaurant.

"The one-eyed guy ogling you?"

She slid gracefully into a vine-covered booth. "Not ogling me, ogling my backside." Sheena was a very pretty woman of twenty-nine—tall, tan, and authentically redhaired.

"He probably saw one of the Pantz commercials," I suggested, settling in opposite her. "Or one of your films, or maybe the poster."

"That thing." Frowning, she picked up the menu, which was diecut in the shape of an enormous carrot. "What a disgusting piece of exploitation that dippy poster was. Why I ever let my agent con me into—"

"It was attractive, reminded me of the old Betty Grable pinup from—"

"Who?"

"Betty Grable, she was noted for her—"

"Legs or something, wasn't it?"

I nodded. "Your poster sold well, didn't it? So you shouldn't—"

"Am I in this only for the money?" Snorting delicately, she tossed her menu aside. "You don't understand what it's like to be famous because you have a sexy rear end. Nobody gives me credit for having any intelligence. I try to explain it's genetically possible to have a brain and a

fanny, yet—there's another thing. There is no polite word in our dippy society for the human backside."

"Posterior?"

She gave one of those snorting laughs of hers. "Oh, really? Would you say that in a mixed crowd of conservative halfwits? 'My wife has a lovely posterior, don't you think?' Not that your wife *does*, but—"

"She used to be a model."

"A fashion model. They don't need buttocks."

"My wife happens to be a very—"

"For a woman of fifty, sure."

"She's barely forty-three," I said. "Listen, Sheena, you seem awfully grumpy today. Did something go wrong at our filming this morning? I noticed Sardonsky patted you on the—posterior—but he does that to everyone he directs in a commercial, male or female."

"Or anything in between." She retrieved her menu. "The sprout ragout is good here."

"What is bothering you then?"

She sighed. "*Him*."

I tried to recall who she was living with. "You mean that actor who rides the star motorcycle on the *Goon Squad*, Tuesday nights at 8?"

"I dumped him months ago." Sheena shook her pretty head impatiently. "I mean the only man I've ever honestly loved. Are you ready to order?"

A gaunt young man in a camouflage suit was hovering beside our booth with an order pad in one lean hand.

I told him, "I'll have the Vegie Reuben."

"The usual," Sheena said.

"Beg pardon, Miss," the waiter said, "but since I've never seen you before in my life bringing you the usual will be rather—"

"See, that's Hollywood," said Sheena. "One season you have a hit TV show and a top-grossing film, the next even callow halfwits don't—"

"I'm very nearsighted," explained the waiter, "so even if you are famous I probably wouldn't recognize you. On top of which, I have absolutely no interest in motion pictures, television, or any other aspect of show business."

She asked, "Then why the heck did you come to Los Angeles?"

"I was born here."

"You aren't just working here until you get discovered?"

"No, I'm working here because I got fired from my job in a missile factory."

"I'll have the Spinach Surprise."

He wrote it down and left us. I said, "You were saying something about—"

"The only man I've ever loved. It's a pity he's such a schmuck." Sheena eyed me. "You mean you really haven't heard about me and Chips Tortuga?"

"I know he's directing *Plantation Fury*," I told her. "But since your part isn't all that large, I assumed—"

"He threw me aside. Just before casting began on the film," she said. "It's rough to have your career skidding at the same time as your love life."

"My wife is close to the wife of Risk Mundy, the star of *Plantation*—"

"That meathead."

"From what I hear, though, Chips isn't all that attractive. I know in newspaper and magazine photos he—"

"Oh, you're falling into show-business judgment patterns, which I suppose is natural after your forty-some years in advertising work—"

"Twenty-five years," I corrected. "Twenty-six next February."

"I admit Chips is short. Squat actually. And he's grossly overweight. He dresses like a sharecropper and smells like the underside of a pier. He has ugly, unsightly blotches all over him and the hair on his misshapen skull would look better on the backside of a porcupine. He has little wartlike growths on most of his fingers and a temper like Jack the Ripper. Still, there's something about him."

"What?" I inquired.

She shrugged one lovely shoulder. "It's hard to pinpoint," she said, a sad smile touching her face. "I love the man, that's all I know. The thirteen and a half weeks we lived together were idyllic. When he wasn't throwing things." She shook her head, red hair swirling. "He's a real genius, you know, and I suppose that's part of the magic of it all."

"He's over budget on *Plantation Fury*, isn't he? And behind schedule?"

"Well, yes."

"How much over?"

"Oh, around twenty-six million."

"Twenty-six million?" I sat upright. "He's twenty-six million *over*?"

"You don't understand what it's like to be a genius."

"I sure understand what twenty-six million bucks is," I told her. "I thought United Media recently announced they weren't going to have any more pictures go beyond budget."

"Those goniffs have been making life very rough for poor Chips," she said. "They're always phoning him at the paddleboat to—"

"Which paddleboat?"

"The one for the film, obviously," Sheena replied. "Chips had it flown in from Mississippi somewhere. The *River Belle* is its name." Her tan hands made fists. "I absolutely hate to think of Chips living on that boat with—Yes?"

Our gaunt young waiter had returned. "Would you mind standing up and turning your back toward the kitchen door?"

"I would, yes," she answered with a faint smile.

"The chef thinks you might be Sheena somebody or other and if he could get a good look at your—"

"Posterior?"

"Right, then he'd be certain."

"I am Sheena Mayday," she said evenly. "And I want to know where in the bloody blue blazes my lunch is."

"Coming right up." He scurried off.

"Chips Tortuga is living on this boat?" I asked her.

"He loves to do things like that. When we made *Blood of a Gunfighter* we lived in a cattle car on a siding near Sweetwater, Texas. For two glorious weeks."

"Was that during part of your thirteen—"

"No, last year. Our romance, like most great ones, recurs. Three weeks last year, thirteen this—"

"I remember now," I said. "My wife told me. Right now Tortuga's romancing the girl who stars in *Plantation Fury*. I can't recall her—"

"Her dippy name is Chili Redondo," snarled Sheena. "She's twenty. Can you beat that? A mere twenty. If I were twenty again I—"

"Is she one of the reasons Tortuga's so late and over budget?"

"Chili's brain is the size of, and has the capabilities of, a jumping bean," explained Sheena. "If you stand close to that scrawny little bimbo you can hear it rattling around in her coco. When Guinness adds a rating for Dumbest Starlet in the known world, Chili Redondo will get a whole page. Comedy writers in need of routines for Vegas standup comics have

but to spend fifteen or so minutes with her and they'll have enough inspiration for a ton of she's-so-dumb-that jokes."

"You don't like her."

"I loathe, detest, dislike, and can't endure her," said my redheaded lunchmate. "What's worse, she's ruining Chips' marvelous movie with her stupidities. The other day they shot one whole morning at Magnolia Hills—that's the name of the old plantation house—before they found out Chili'd parked her chewing gum behind her ear and it showed in the close-ups. She ruined seventy-six takes on the farewell to the Confederate troops scene because instead of saying, 'You all hurry back, you hear,' she insisted on saying, 'Youse all.' She's always at least two hours late, she can never find her marks, she has a tendency to burp during love scenes, she—"

"There's talk of dumping Chili and replacing her."

"Won't happen," said Sheena. "Chips is completely smitten. They're living on that steamboat like a couple of bloody lovebirds. If she goes, he goes."

"Isn't there a possibility they'll can him too?"

"No, because he's still hot. Do you know how many Oscar nominations *Blood of a Gunfighter* got?"

"Seven."

"Nine, and it's already grossed near as much as *Star Wars*," she said. "As long as Chips stays stupidly infatuated with her, she'll stay on. However, I have an idea."

I made a quick stop-right-there gesture with my hand. "I don't want to listen to any plan for violence, blackmail, or—"

"What I'm talking about is love," Sheena insisted. "I intend to win Chips back. See, where I made my mistake last time was by being too feisty and independent. This time I'm going to do the domestic bit, be all frills and hot meals. I was reading an excellent article in—"

"C'mon, Sheena, that's not you," I pointed out. "You shouldn't compromise your—"

"Who's telling me not to compromise? Aren't you the bloke who wrote the voice-over copy for this latest Pantz commercial?"

"I supervised the writing."

" 'Slip yourself into a pair of Pantz,' " she quoted in a little Shirley Temple voice. " 'They're the fashion jeans that are tight like that!' " She

laughed. "Didn't you ever dream of writing a great book, or at least a great script? 'Tight like that.' Oh, golly."

"Convincing people your jeans are superior isn't the same as betraying your principles for a man who smells like a porcupine."

"He *looks* like a porcupine. He *smells* like low tide at San Pedro," she said. "At least I love Chips Tortuga. You don't love Pantz."

"I respect them. Besides, the parallel isn't—"

"Be that as it may, I'm going to edge Chili out of his life," she promised. "That's going to save the movie *and* our romance."

I put both hands on the table top, leaned toward her. "Listen, Sheena, I hear that a good deal of the money being poured into *Plantation Fury* may be coming from organized crime. Could be the best thing for you to do is finish up your small role and get safely away from—"

"Oh, Jiggs has told me all those rumors about—"

"Who's Jiggs?"

"He's a second unit director in charge of the stunts for the picture; Jiggs-Arabee," she said. "He knows this town and he says those dippy rumors simply started because of the Five Kings."

"That 1950's singing group?"

"Fifties, sixties, some time in the dim past. The point is they're loaded, from shrewd real-estate deals over the years, and they're the main backers of the movie."

"So?"

"Well, they used to play Reno and Las Vegas a lot and so some small-minded people think they're linked with mobsters and all," Sheena said. "It's nothing but unfounded gossip."

"If it's true, though, you—"

"My mind is made up. I'm going to keep playing this dinky and quite demeaning part. In fact, I'm flying back up to Sacro tonight after we finish up this Pantz thing. I'll oust that dumb little bimbo, get her tossed clean off the riverboat, and save Chips and his career."

"Not an easy task," I mentioned.

Sheena simply laughed.

She returned to the film location near the state capital and two days later I had to go out of town unexpectedly. Another of the accounts I was responsible for was having some unforeseen problems in the Cleveland area. Glimmer Toothpaste was test-marketing a new formulation there,

one containing a miracle ingredient we'd christened Smilenium, and some of the customers who'd tried the new stuff were claiming it was giving them lockjaw.

This wasn't true lockjaw, I found on arrival—their mouths were merely being glued shut because of an unexpected bonding quality Smilenium developed when mixed with certain types of saliva.

As soon as I checked into one of Cleveland's finest hotels I attempted to get more details from Glimmer's chief chemist, who'd been in town supervising the introduction of the new product. Unfortunately, he'd sampled some himself and his own teeth were cemented together.

The chemist stubbornly insisted on communicating by way of handwritten memos and, since his script was as wretched as that of most medical people, it took me quite a while to comprehend that an error had been made in mixing up several thousand tubes of New Improved Glimmer with Smilenium. What was in the tubes was a very sturdy imitation of Goofy Glue.

Seeing to it that all the flawed tubes of Glimmer were unobtrusively recalled, writing up six radio spots that subtly downplayed what had been happening, and locating our client's attorney on his yacht in the Caribbean took two and a half weeks out of my life.

During those same two and a half weeks Sheena was trying out her initial scheme to woo Chips Tortuga back by attempting to be more traditionally feminine.

The fact that Chips was under increasing pressure from United Media Studios, who were under increasing pressure from their shadowy backers, didn't help Sheena's cause. Two things were the basis of the nearly continuous arguments Tortuga was having with the various studio executives who made the pilgrimage up to the outskirts of Sacramento—Chili Rondo and the *River Belle*.

"She's inept," Shackamaxon, vice-president of United Media, told him during a nervous indoor luncheon on the upper deck of the paddleboat.

"That's her style," explained the director, biting at a hangnail.

"She's costing us a blinking fortune," bemoaned Shackamaxon, gazing out at the river which ran unenthusiastically by the moored boat. "Somebody in accounting just figured out Chili uses up an average of thirty-seven takes per shot and each one—"

"The girl is a slow starter."

"But, Chips, you're twenty-seven million over budget and the end is nowhere in—"

"Twenty-six million," said Chips Tortuga.

"Let me be candid," said the V.P. "We have faith in *you*, my boy, but we don't want to take a bath on this picture."

"Fear not, meathead."

"That's what they told the passengers on *The Titanic*."

Tortuga commenced singing in an off-key whine, "Wasn't it sad when the great ship went down? Wasn't it sad when—"

"What the hell is that?"

"Famous old spiritual concerning the sinking of *The Titanic*," replied the youthful director, wiping his lunch-stained palms across the bib of his overalls. "Best known from the old 78 rpm recording by the legendary Blind Willie Johnson. Now there was a man with a fascinating life. I'd love to film something about his—"

"But not in this picture," said Shackamaxxon anxiously.

"Probably not."

That same afternoon one of the Five Kings, clad in an impeccable 1950's-style pinstripe suit, paid a visit to Chips Tortuga during a break in the filming. "Hi, buddy," he grinned.

Scratching his armpit enthusiastically Tortuga asked, "What do you want, fathead?"

"We decided you don't need the boat."

"You're wrong. I do."

"No, you got to concentrate on the stuff up at the old plantation and the battles," the former vocalist informed him. "You don't have any time for a riverboat."

"I need this one."

"How come?"

"For the race."

"Which race is that?"

"The riverboat race I've been thinking of for the finish of the film."

"You can't have a race with one damn boat."

"Which is why, fathead, I'm seriously thinking about ordering a second one."

The swarthy singer frowned. "We wouldn't like that," he said very quietly.

When, sometime after twilight, Tortuga returned to his specially furnished suite aboard the *River Belle*, he was in an unusually foul mood. "What's that incredibly cruddy smell?" he demanded of the living room. "Pot roast," replied Sheena, very sweetly, from the nearby galley. Scowling, the pudgy little director went storming in. "Where's Chili?" "Detained," answered Sheena in what she felt was a demure and feminine voice.

With the help of her stuntman friend, Jiggs Arabee, she'd done a few things to the Porsche Chili had used to drive into Sacramento an hour earlier—things guaranteed to cause the car to collapse and strand the rival actress for at least several hours.

"And what's that godawful thing you're wearing?"

"An apron, dear."

"You look lousy in frills, fathead," he remarked. "Now get your keester off my boat."

"But, Chips, I've cooked you a surprise dinner. Pot roast, purple cabbage, potato pancakes, crisp—"

"Stop already, you're giving me heartburn."

He turned his pudgy back on her. "Anyhow, dimbulb, you ought to know I always fast during filming."

"You sure didn't fast during *Blood of a Gunfighter*. You gained fifty-three pounds from—"

"That was a western." He faced her, his quilly hair erect. "Please do me the favor of disembarking."

"You can't have been fasting all this time. I mean, you and that bimbo have been holed up here on this dippy boat for seventeen solid weeks while—"

"Who's been talking to you?" he growled, making a threatening fist with one warty hand.

"No one, dear."

"Was it that fathead Shackamaxxon? Or that hoodlum tenor? Are they trying to take this film away from me?" He grabbed her bare arm. "This is the culmination, so far, of my screen career. I've got to complete this one. Something important inside me cries out to—"

"Ho ho!"

They both looked toward the doorway.

There, car grease streaking her pretty forehead and road dust spattered

across her silken jumpsuit, was Chili Redondo. "Try to sabotage me, huh? You big floozie!"

The fiery actress's charge was delayed by a loose board at the threshold. Even so, she got to Sheena very swiftly. Chili was a much better fighter than she was an actress and with five or six well planted punches she decked Sheena. She then dragged her up a stairway and over to a riverside railing. "You better stay away from my man," she warned and then booted Sheena off the deck and down into the sluggish waters of the Sacramento tributary.

The rest of this isn't based on fact, only on conjecture and surmise. My wife did get a few details from Risk Mundy's wife, but I'm guessing on many of the specifics. Then, too, I wasn't in Los Angeles when the explosions occurred. Our Glimmer client had decided to introduce a new glue and I had to jet to Terre Haute, Indiana, to supervise the test-marketing of the initial batches. Although early customers liked the glue's effectiveness, some of them were complaining because it smelled strongly of toothpaste. I had to improvise a series of radio commercials that made an asset of our new glue's near overpowering spearmint odor.

Meantime, up near Sacramento, Sheena had come to the conclusion she could never win Tortuga back while the feisty Chili Redondo walked the earth. Love, as I long ago learned, pushes people into strange corners. Sheena, too, had been talking to the stunt director, Jiggs Arabee, and she knew the Five Kings, who were almost certainly a front for the legitimate investing of mob money, were growing increasingly unhappy with Tortuga. They didn't like his continuing to use the untalented Chili and they didn't like his insisting he was going to add a very expensive steamboat race to the already fantastically overbudget *Plantation Fury*.

One bright spring afternoon Sheena was watching Jiggs supervise a Civil War battle scene in a sprawl of woodlands that had survived between two Sacramento suburbs. As the prearranged explosions simulated cannon fire and the soldiers, each man clad in a meticulously accurate and grossly expensive uniform, ran and yelled and shot at each other, Sheena suddenly snapped her lovely fingers.

"Of course," she said to herself. "An explosion."

An explosion, cleverly done, would eliminate Chili and the *River Belle*. With those two millstones gone from around his pudgy yet gifted neck, Tortuga would be free. With deft help from Sheena, he'd come to his

senses. The riverboat sequence would be dropped and he'd take Sheena back into his life.

Fate, so she thought, provided her with a perfect opportunity just two days later. Tortuga had to fly to Las Vegas for an urgent conference with some key investors. He was leaving Chili behind, on board the steamboat.

A steamboat, even one sitting at a simulated dock, might have an accidental explosion. And so quite late that night Sheena, dressed in a black pullover and a snug pair of ebony Pantz, jobbed the lock on the film's dynamite box and took out enough to take care of Chili Redondo. She'd watched Jiggs rig explosions often enough to be confident she could blow up the *River Belle* and her tough little rival.

There were, however, a few things Sheena didn't know as she sneaked through the moonless night toward the paddlewheeler.

She didn't know about the phone call one of the Five Kings had made to Shackamaxon that afternoon.

"Buy a dog," he suggested in his baritone voice.

"Huh? What the hell—"

"Buy a dog and a white cane. Because unless that Latino broad and that boat go, you'll need 'em."

Earlier that same day, also unknown to Sheena, a call had come to Tortuga on location.

He'd answered it with, "What's the idea, meathead, of—"

"Get a wheelchair," said the Five Kings alto.

"Listen, I—"

"Or crutches maybe. Because if Chili and that damn riverboat stay on, you'll have two broken legs. At the very least."

Shackamaxon slipped up to Sacramento late that day and, once he learned that only Chili was aboard the *River Belle*, planted a fairly sophisticated plastic bomb just under the bedroom the actress was using. After setting it to go off at midnight, he then headed quietly back to Hollywood.

Tortuga, valuing his legs more than his art or his love and knowing he could never cajole the tough-minded Chili off his picture or his boat, put a complex time bomb of his own devising inside the oven of the galley stove. He set it to go off at midnight, knowing Chili never went near the stove, and arranged to be in Vegas long before his boat and his mistress went up.

The authorities found the remains of both bombs when sifting the rubble. The one they never found a single trace of was the one Jiggs Arabee, working on the orders of the people behind the Five Kings, had concealed in the riverboat's boiler. Jiggs, the only real demolition expert in the bunch, had also set his to go off at midnight.

And just one minute before midnight Sheena, little homemade bomb in her hand and a smile of anticipation on her lovely face, went sneaking up the dark gangplank.



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Deems was your typical honest stiff . . .

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?

by A.E. SCHRAFF



I got this theory. Some guys are born crooks. They withdraw money they haven't deposited in the bank, rip off jewels, and hot-wire Caddies for the purpose of permanently borrowing them, all because of the kinds of genes they got. In other words, everybody does what he or she has to and you can't blame a crook for being a crook. Last time I got busted for burglary, I tried to explain my theory to Claire, my girl friend, and she wasn't impressed. She ran off at the mouth about a guy being able to

reform and that kind of junk, and she called me a creep. But still, she visited me in jail and stuck by me, so what are you going to do?

Anyway, a couple of weeks ago I spotted this dumb jewelry salesman, Herman Deems, and I got onto a supersweet deal. Twice a week, usually around seven in the evening, he parks in the lot behind Kretzlers Jewelry. He brings out some valuable stuff that's been shown to rich folks who decided against it. He takes it for vault storage because the stuff's too good to be kept in a crackerbox joint like Kretzlers. I figured if I hit Deems I'd have enough for my retirement.

I told Claire I was going straight this time. I'm the shady side of forty-five and doing time gets harder every visit. Crime's a young man's business, sort of like sports. Anyway, the jails are so crowded now it's hell being in one and the taxpayers are getting real testy about laying out money for nicer big houses.

I planned to get this one last haul, marry Claire, and retire to a tropical fishing village in Baja. So I started keeping tabs on Deems, getting his routine down. Like most honest guys, he was stupid—never altered his schedule to throw off a would-be thief. He'd come from Kretzlers with his briefcase and walk briskly to his station wagon, toss the case on the seat beside him, and drive away.

I did a little research and found out such guys carry thousands of dollars' worth of ice, so there'd be plenty for me and Claire to live on. In spite of my dishonest heart, I'm a guy with simple tastes.

I planned the job for Wednesday in the early evening. At noon I had lunch with Claire at the greasy spoon where she holds forth as waitress. Claire's no great shakes as a waitress, but she's got a mop of fiery red hair that bounces against the back of her uniform when she walks, and she's nice to look at any which way you glance. I told her I was onto a good deal and she frowned and said, "You're not planning some dirty work, are you?"

"No, baby. See, I met this old buddy of mine and we got a chance to buy into what they call penny stocks that shoot up like crazy. We can make a bundle. Then you and I can get that little dream *casa* in Mexico, right?"

"Oh, Ben. That'd be so nice. I mean, being married and with you and stuff. I wouldn't care where it was. Right here even. I don't want anything but you, Ben honey." See? The lady's not so bright, but good to look at and with a kind heart, so what are you going to do?

Deems was your typical honest stiff, in his late forties, wouldn't take a paper clip that didn't belong to him. Lived in a dumpy tract house, fighting with the telephone company over an overdue bill, yet he lugged around jewelry worth a fortune. Like I said, it's in the genes. Deems was born with honest genes.

It was raining Wednesday, which I considered a good break. The parking lot was usually pretty deserted at this hour, but today it was even more so. All I had to do was wait for Deems to come from Kretzlers, crack him over the head with the blackjack I'd brought along for the purpose, and run with the briefcase. Deems was a skinny little guy and he'd go down easy.

Deems was inside Kretzlers a little longer than usual. I didn't like that. A guy like me who has everything figured down to the last detail gets nervous when there's a change in a pattern. It usually means trouble.

When Deems finally appeared, he was walking faster than usual. He looked pale and distraught. His tie was crooked and his few strands of hair were mussed. Something had happened in Kretzlers.

Then Kretzler appeared at the back door, staggered, and went down with the heavy slump of a dead man. My brain was spinning. The little weasel had robbed his boss! Robbed and killed him for probably a very big payoff in the briefcase. Apparently the sight of the jewelry had finally been too much and the pipsqueak's genes turned on him.

I ignored the slashing rain and headed for the scurrying little rodent with the case. But Kretzler had pushed the alarm before he checked out and a police car was careening up. I watched with the eerie sensation of being in a slow-motion movie where things are happening beyond your control.

One cop jumped from the black-and-white. They say you're getting old when cops look like kids to you. I swear I must be ready for a pension because this cop looked seventeen.

Deems had murdered one guy for the loot and now he spun around and gunfire made dirty smoke in the rain. The cop went down, clutching his stomach.

I was a few yards behind Deems, then closer. The frantic little weasel never saw me. I banged him over the head and he went down with a groan. I wrenched the briefcase from his fingers and began to sprint for my car with a hundred sparkling tickets to a lifetime in Baja.

But I had to pass the kid-cop and he was bleeding bad. I stared at his

blood mixing with the rainwater in the gutter and I don't know what went through my mind, but something sure as hell went haywire. Because the next thing I knew I'd pulled off my sweater, wadded it, and was holding it tightly to the cop's wound to plug up the fountain of blood.

The lousy, rainy night glowed with the red lights of other cop cars then and I thought how wild it was that my stupid genes turned on me the same day Deems's turned on him.

I'm working at the greasy spoon too now and married to Claire. This week I'm getting an award for saving the cop and helping catch a murderer. I got a new theory. Guys who are born with crooked genes shouldn't hang out with dumb ladies like Claire. Little by little, half the time without you even knowing what's happening, they turn you into the kind of a jerk who blows a hundred thousand worth of jewels for a fuzz-faced kid in blue.

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Cannon liked the sociopathic look of the kid's eyes . . .

FUTURES



Corky Cannon, plump and elegant, is interviewing a sales applicant, this Miller kid Buzz Clay recommended. Cannon is sizing him up, reading him for secrets. He has a technique, a two-minute drill more effective than any grapevine, any amount of intelligence-gathering. He'll do his gig on this Ray Miller and know in an instant whether he *is* or he *isn't*.

Cannon leans back in chromium and leather, swivels lazily, effects a

far-off expression of nostalgic contentment as if he were recalling something wonderful, carnal, and nearly forgotten.

"I had this mooch once, Ray," Cannon says, "a mooch you wouldn't believe. A dream! A geezer, retired carpenter or something, didn't have much but the insurance on his wife, who'd just croaked. He had this son who was pestering him to invest it—to keep ahead of inflation and what-not. Well, Sonny's waltzing him around to Merrill, Lynch and places like that, but the old man isn't biting. Not yet. The kid even subscribed the old man to some financial journals, which is how his name turned up. Like I said, I have these guys who get me these mailing lists: You sign on here and you're not just looking at a dial tone and the White Pages.

"Anyway, I called him up with a hunch that silver would be the thing. No way with gold. A few ounces wouldn't be substantial enough for him. Heating oil too exploitive. Pork bellies too abstract.

"I'm working him into a six-month silver option, see—a one-third split on a five-thousand-ounce contract. The geezer's staying right with me. After all, he reads the papers. I start dropping names of so-called contacts in Houston and manage to convince him the Hunt Brothers are gonna rush the puck again. Very, very soon. Bingo, I've got his twenty-eight grand wired to my account in sixty seconds flat! The policy was for thirty. Essentially, I left him with bus fare. That's just one example, Ray, of how we make things happen here."

Corky Cannon pauses, scans the kid.

FBI, SEC, Attorney General's Office, any ringer, they hear you disembowel some middle-aged mooch's nest egg like that and the body language bubbles to the surface, if just for an instant—they can't contain their contempt. A split second of cold disgust from across the desk. An expression that tells you you're raw sewage, that you have hair growing on the palms of your hands. Then it's transition time. You wind down the interview talking about cold fronts and the Jets, then send them on their way.

But all Raymond Miller discloses is a shrug and a smirk. Corky decides he *isn't*, although he does appear a bit out of sync for the profession—big neck, leathery hands, soft demeanor. On the plus side, he is in uniform, one similar to Cannon's: pin stripes, regimental tie, tan—the dress greys Cannon insists his people wear in case an anxious mooch happens to locate the boiler room and drop by.

And, after all, Buzz Clay did send him over. Clay specializes in dia-

monds, but there had been some recent heat, forcing him to take a sabbatical. To Mazatlán or St. Pete, depending on who you believe.

Miller looks around Cannon's tiny office, makes a sweeping gesture. "Harrison, Roper, and Chase Investment, Inc.?"

"Pure ether, Raymond," Cannon says. "Just like the commodities we handle. Ghosts who never lived. Last year it was Lessing, Davison, and Blasingame, Ltd. Terrific tweedy names. Are you ready to go to work?"

Miller hesitates and asks, "You're into what—metals, foreign exchange, crude oil? Buzz was kind of vague."

"We go with the flow, Ray. Our special for the day is anything that's hot. You watch the network news the other night, that frost they've got on the coffee plants in Brazil? Very, very rare, but potentially devastating a ways down the road. You suggest coffee futures to a mooch now and you hear heavy breathing. Next week, who can say? Basically, we handle anything that's traded."

"What about callbacks? The mooch's investment has spiked. He wants to cash in. Then what?"

"Cannon's Canon: Never Ever Give a Mooch More Than Five Percent of What He's Invested. What you do is get as enthusiastic as he is about his wise choice, then reload him. Double him up if possible. Make him feel like the village idiot if he wants to bail out now. By the time he catches on, we've moved on."

"Sounds pat."

Cannon likes the look of the kid's eyes. They have a nice greedy, sociopathic glow. "It is," Cannon assures him. "I mean, we deal strictly in paper, like those scout masters on Wall Street, except we don't own what we're selling. Just like your schtick with Buzz. Nobody expects a load of live hogs or plywood dumped off in his front yard. Do it by Corky's book and you can hang a mooch in a holding pattern indefinitely."

Cannon springs to his feet, anxious to close on the kid. He has a free telephone out back. He sees it every morning when he comes in and it appears lonely, almost melancholy, and it's costing him a bundle with Ma Bell. "Lemme show you the plant."

A door leads from Cannon's office to another room. It's larger than his office and the reception area out front put together, but not by much, and it's almost filled by a long wide table with eight partitions. The voices of seven salesmen blend into an incomprehensible din.

"No matter what you pay per square foot you just can't rent good acoustics any more," Cannon says sadly.

"That's O.K.," Miller says. "You get that background noise, the mooch figures it's a going concern. Small shop."

"I like it that way," Cannon says truthfully. "You set up a factory, you have problems, not the least being logistical in the event you have to break camp on short notice. And I've found that a few good troops are worth a lot more than a room full of used-car types."

Cannon *wants* this kid. He has a good feeling about him and Buzz raved about his performance during the brief period they'd been together.

Pointing to the nearest man Cannon says, "We're fully scripted here. Before I put you on the front line I train you until you're dreaming about the material. Nobody's gonna be surprised by any lame defense a mooch throws up. Listen."

The man is bald and intense, of indeterminate age. His knuckles are wrapped around the receiver as if it was grafted. "Who wears the pants in your family, Mr. Grant? You or your wife?"

Cannon winks at Ray Miller. "Larry's been working him a while. This is his 'close' call. A now-or-never situation. When logic fails, you go for the hormones."

The next salesman is saying, "When was the last time your lawyer made you any money? He knows law, Fred. I know options."

And the next, in his twenties, Miller's age. He is virtually screaming. "The only thing I want you to think about is what you're going to do with the forty thousand you'll clear by the end of March!"

"Impressive," Miller tells Cannon. "Buzz wasn't quite as structured as you appear to be. We had a few problems."

Cannon *has* him. He winks again, nudges gently. "Let's get out of here. It's late and they're rolling up the sidewalks out on the Coast. I'll buy you a cold one."

Miller follows Cannon to the elevator, which takes them to the parking garage in the basement. For a youngster, Cannon knows, this is the bottom line—the ultimate perk. Cannon unlocks the passenger door for Miller, asks casually, "You like?"

It is a Porsche Turbo, solid gold, glistening gold, as golden as the contracts Cannon sells that he does not own. The Turbo, however, is real. It has spoilers, a sun roof, leather seats, speed, power, sex.

Miller slips in, his eyes pressing against their sockets. Cannon would

swear the kid is trying to swallow his Adam's apple. Funny about these kids—a set of wheels is the end of the rainbow. He has a couple of them back at the office like that, hitting on the mooches with a vengeance so they can get into one of those Italian screamers.

The kid regains his ability to speak at the plush watering hole, where Cannon is deferred to like a visiting head of state because of his façade and his generous tips.

"Looks great, Corky," he says, sipping a beer. Cannon is enjoying a Beefeater martini with a twist. The bar personnel here have long since learned that the vermouth portion should be little more than an innuendo.

"Buzz thinks the world of you, Raymond, despite the fact that you were a rookie and you had to bail out when he did."

Miller smiles sheepishly. "I was grateful for the break. I used to sell aluminum siding door-to-door. I got lucky. Too bad about Buzz."

"Yeah, well, don't sweat it. The guy always lands on his feet. My profit, his loss."

"Tell me something, Corky," Miller says seriously, leaning over the table. "That story about the old man and the silver—was that true or a test?"

Good instincts, Cannon thinks, nodding appreciably. "Both. A composite. I needed a peek at your internal machinery."

"Did I pass?"

"Flying colors, Ray."

"How about grain and soybeans? You ever handle it?"

"Very, very iffy in this town," Cannon says. "Chicago is a different story. I was in Chi during that Russian wheat deal. Couldn't miss. Some of my all-time scores were made with hicks back there. You interested in that sort of thing?"

"Kind of," Miller says casually.

A skimpily clad waitress brings another round of drinks. Cannon excuses himself to make a phone call. When he returns, he raises his glass. "Deal?"

Miller clinks his glass against Cannon's. "Deal. I'm impressed."

Then Miller starts on grain again, like he has an intellectual interest in it, like he wants a Board of Trade or Merc seat when he grows up.

Cannon tries to deflect the subject, explaining that this is a glamour town. A guy sees a DeBeers ad in a magazine, gets an itch, and—

Cannon's eyes blur. It isn't double vision—shapes and spaces suddenly have too little definition even for that. The Muzak has degenerated into

a loud buzz. He thinks there are people at the table, he thinks he hears Ray Miller explaining to them that Mr. Cannon had been drinking all afternoon and he'll see to it Mr. Cannon gets home safely.

Cannon is remembering this when he awakens with a crushing headache.

He is indoors, in a warehouse or maybe a garage. It's dank and the light is only slightly better than that in the bar. His eyes finally focus and he sees Miller standing next to a pickup truck full of burlap bags.

"Welcome back, Corky," Miller says, opening the door of Cannon's Porsche.

Cannon realizes he's inside the car, behind the wheel. He is buckled in. His arms are tied tightly to his sides. His feet are bound too. He cannot speak—his mouth is taped shut.

"Mmmph!"

"Save your breath, Corky. I'll explain."

Cannon now sees the knife in Miller's hand.

"Mmmph!"

"No, no, no. I'm not going to use it on you. My father was one of your Chicago hicks. He worked a small farm in southern Illinois all his life. Most of the land was leased, so when he sold out he didn't get much for it. Five acres and an old house. That's all that was actually his. He raised soybeans, Corky. Soybeans.

"All his life he groused about the traders who made fortunes on crops they never saw while he just scraped by. Well, he decided to put the money into futures, get in on the gravy. He had the misfortune of dealing with you, Corky. You know the rest.

"He was too mortified to do anything about it after he learned he'd been fleeced. He wouldn't let me do anything either. Dad died a month ago, so I came after you, Corky. I'm sorry I had to be associated with a slime like your pal Buzz, but I needed an in, a contact to steer me to you. I set up Buzz with the authorities. That's why he's out of business. I even managed to get him to call you on my behalf before he left town. The rest is, as they say, history."

Miller has been holding his knife close to Cannon's face throughout the monologue, but now withdraws it and slams the car door shut.

He walks to the truck, pulls off one of the bags, carries it to the Porsche, and rips it open with the knife.

"In case you've never seen one before, Corky, these are soybeans," he says evenly. "I thought it would be appropriate."

Miller, with his sturdy farm-boy build, hefts the bag and dumps its contents through the open sunroof, then brings another bag and repeats the process. He does it again and again.

Beans are cascading on Cannon's head. The interior of the car is filling with them. Tirelessly and silently, Miller works on. The beans are up to Cannon's stomach now. Miller continues.

Cannon, for a few more moments; can see the bed of the truck. Bags are still piled high. There is no possibility that Miller will run out.



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Someone had used the carotid squeeze on Miyako . . .

THE DIVINE WIND



Police Inspector Toshiko Ueki suggested that the best remedy for my lingering flu was a steam bath and massage.

My illness had forced me to miss a week as manager of our company's computer hardware office in Okayama, a pleasant city in western Japan between Kobe and Hiroshima. Noriko, my recent bride and Inspector Ueki's youngest daughter, had tried most of the conventional treatments without success and finally called her parents one evening after the in-

spector had returned from his office. He arrived shortly thereafter, padding into our tatami-mat sleeping room in his socks and looking down at me solemnly with his intense dark eyes.

"O genki desuka?" How are you?

"Byoki," I groaned. Sick.

The inspector, tall and athletically lean, clasped his hands behind his back and thought for a moment.

"Perhaps, Sam," he suggested, "we should resort to drastic measures."

"How's that, Toshiko?"

"A good steam bath and massage. Do you agree, Noriko?"

"Yes, Father." She smiled. "If you go with him."

"Mochiron." Of course. "We will go to the New Paradise Hotel in the Willow District. I saw a newspaper advertisement just this morning concerning new facilities."

Noriko fussed over me as I dressed. The inspector and I stepped down into the entranceway, slipped on our shoes, and walked out the sliding glass door, crossing the bridge over the small stream running parallel to the main highway. We had walked only a few meters when Ueki successfully hailed a taxi. I sat back and closed my eyes, stewing in my miseries, only vaguely aware of the clicking of the meter.

The clerk at the New Paradise Hotel glanced at me curiously, but quickly complied with Ueki's request for two steam baths and massages. He handed over numbered plastic disks and we each paid three thousand yen, about twelve dollars. The clerk directed us to take seats in the lounge and a few minutes later two young women dressed in red T-shirts and gym shorts came to us, collected our customer numbers, and accompanied us on an elevator to the massage rooms on the third floor.

The woman who was to be my masseuse looked at me nervously and tapped Ueki lightly on the shoulder. "Nihon go wa dekimasuka?" Can he speak Japanese?

Ueki laughed. "Yes, he has lived here for several years. He has been quite ill with the flu and whatever you can do to help will be appreciated."

"Hai, wakarimashita!" Yes, sir, understood!

My masseuse asked me to undress and don a pair of terrycloth shorts, turning her back politely as I did so. She then took me to the steam chair and folded the plastic halves together, leaving only my head and neck exposed. She packed towels around my neck and turned on the steam.

And then, as I relaxed, she began that most charming of universal human customs, the exchange of information that gives us separate identities and personalities. Her name was Miyako Inoue, she was twenty-eight, married, had always wanted to visit the States, and was pleased that I had come to the New Paradise Hotel. In return, I told her my name (Sam Brent), age (thirty-five), profession, and happily married status.

"And the other gentleman is your friend?" I explained that he was my good friend, my father-in-law, and a police inspector. "Ah, so desuka?" Is that so? She took a piece of pumice and scoured my arms and back. I had begun to feel much better.

"Now, Bulentu-san, if you will please get on the table and lie on your stomach I will try to take the aches out of your muscles."

She began with the toes, pulling and stretching, bent my feet recklessly, kneaded, pounded, and slapped, providing painful proof of how much force a diminutive, forty-six-kilogram person can exert. I gnashed my teeth as she worked on the stiff shoulder muscles, smiling in relief when the massage was completed.

I was putting on my shoes when Ueki walked in.

"Ah, feeling better, Sam?"

"Much."

We thanked Miyako, she asked us to return, and we departed, declining the customary lagniappe of a beer or soft drink.

Noriko smiled her pleasure at our return, bowing to us gracefully as we removed our shoes in the entranceway. We went to our western-style family room and sat on the sofa in front of the coffee table. Noriko brought out a large bottle of Kirin beer, glasses, and a plate of tsu-dakko, the sliced cold octopus in vinegar I was so fond of.

Ueki stabbed one of the delicacies with a toothpick and chewed with obvious satisfaction. "Tell me, Sam," he asked, "are you just a little sore from that massage?"

"Not at all, Toshiko," I lied. "I stay in good physical condition all of the time." He scowled at me and ate the rest of the octopus before saying good night.

Goto-san, my chief clerk, had put in long days during my absence and was relieved when I returned to work. I found a backlog of orders for installation of our bilingual computer print-out systems which a variety

of Japanese industries were using to facilitate instructions, invoices, and business letters in concise English.

It took almost two weeks to bring our work load back to normal and I decided to reward the staff by holding a dinner party. Employees in a Japanese business are like family members and, while our profits were diminished somewhat by the custom of three bonuses a year, my company agreed the extra expense was worth the loyalty and increased productivity. I also followed the custom of bringing everyone together several times a year and paying for it out of my own pocket. This showed a respect for my staff that was genuine, not an empty gesture to be put on an expense account.

Goto-san made the reservations at the Flower Restaurant in the Nishigawa District and I asked Ueki to participate. (Noriko and Mrs. Ueki also were invited, but Japanese wives rarely attend such functions and they did not come.) We sat crosslegged around the long low table, Ueki to my left, Goto-san to my right. The kimono-garbed serving women brought sake and beer first, and, as expected, I made a short speech praising everyone for the extra efforts made during my illness. I lifted a glass of beer and bowed to them. "Kampai." Cheers. I then moved from person to person, pouring beer and sake, then sat back on my cushion as the others reciprocated. An empty glass in Japan is an insult. We enjoyed a standard business dinner: ebi (boiled shrimp), sushi, sashimi, gohan (a bowl of rice), and misoshiru, a soup prepared by boiling a soybean base with various vegetables.

After we had eaten Ueki remarked that the sake had made him drowsy. "Yes," Goto-san said. I agreed.

"Why," I asked, "don't we all go take a steam bath and get the sake out of our systems? My treat."

"Excellent, excellent," Ueki beamed, and Goto-san passed the invitation along to the others. Most accepted, so I paid the bill and asked the mistress of the restaurant to call several taxis. We trooped out to the street and soon were en route to the New Paradise Hotel.

There was a different clerk, a short stocky man dressed in a yellow sport shirt and green slacks. I asked for Miyako and he seemed to hesitate a moment before agreeing. When she approached me in the lounge, I noted the change in her. She seemed to be apprehensive, even frightened, and did not speak as we rode the elevator to the massage rooms.

My efforts to make small talk failed and finally, as I sat in the steam chair, I asked her bluntly, "Nan desuka, Miyako-san?" What is it? She covered her face, crying silently. "Bulentu-san," she whispered, "there is new management at the hotel. Not such nice people. They have new girls working on the fourth floor. Not nice, you know?"

"Prostitutes?"

"Yes."

"Then I'd better tell Inspector Ueki. Maybe he can do something."

Her face paled. "No, please. If you say anything there may be trouble. Someone may be hurt."

I had an idea that that someone might be Miyako. "All right, I won't say anything now, but I must talk to Ueki-san about this sooner or later and I'm sure he'll see that you're protected. Now please let me out of here." She opened the sides of the steam chair and left the room. I dressed.

Ueki, his face grim, walked in moments later. "I heard. These partitions are very thin and I was in the next room. I suggest we gather the rest of our group and leave."

The clerk followed us to the street, staring. Ueki's home was near mine, so we shared a taxi. He promised to call me as soon as his men could investigate the situation.

Ueki's call came two days later. He informed me his men had raided the New Paradise Hotel, arresting a number of prostitutes and customers on the fourth floor the night before.

"Who was running the operation?"

"We don't know yet, Sami, but I intend to find out. Now, please excuse me, I have much paperwork to do." I thanked him for the call and finished my own paperwork relatively early. Noriko had dinner ready when I got home. We were finishing the dishes when the telephone rang.

"Moshi, moshi. Brent desu." Hello, Brent here.

"Sam. Toshiko." There was a taut urgency in his voice. "Please meet me at the Okayama National Hospital. Soon. Ask for me at the desk."

I told Noriko I'd be back as soon as possible and broke several traffic laws on my way to the hospital.

It was Miyako. Her eyes open but unfocused, she lay on the hospital

bed. Nutrients and medication dripped slowly from a suspended bottle into a vein in her arm.

"What happened, Toshiko?"

The inspector's eyes were like obsidian, half closed in anger. "Someone used the carotid squeeze on her."

I understood. There is a technique in the martial arts where thumb pressure can be applied on the neck slightly under an opponent's earlobes. The pressure shuts off the only major blood supply to the brain from the carotid arteries. If it is maintained long enough, unconsciousness results. Too long, and the opponent dies. But the person who had attacked Miyako Inoue applied pressure with a cruel expertise, attempting to make a brain-dead vegetable of her. Another masseuse had found her lying on the floor of one of the massage rooms.

"What do the doctors say?"

He continued looking at Miyako. "They will not know for some time yet. Everything depends on how long the brain was deprived of oxygen." The door to the room opened and a man rushed in. He stood by the bed for a moment, staring wide-eyed, then dropped to his knees, crying in ragged sobs.

Her husband.

Ueki raised him to his feet gently. "There is hope and you must have courage, Inoue-san. I give you my word that we will try to see that whoever did this will be brought to justice." The man bowed his thanks, unable to speak, and we left.

I walked to the hospital parking lot with Ueki. He motioned for me to get into the cruiser with him.

"I am going back to the New Paradise Hotel," he said, "and you may be my unofficial guest if you choose. My superiors were impressed with your actions in the Doi case, and there will be no problems. Do you wish to go?"

I did. It had become my affair. I was the one who had promised protection and I felt obligated to offer my belated help. Ueki radioed the dispatcher and asked for two back-up cruisers to be sent to the hotel.

We arrived first. The same flashily dressed clerk was behind the front desk. Ueki slapped his identification down in front of him. "You have no business here now," the clerk snapped.

Ueki clamped his hand around the man's wrist and spoke slowly. "Miyako Inoue. The girl who worked here. Who hurt her?"

The clerk looked at me and grinned, displaying uneven tobacco-stained teeth. "Maybe some dirty foreigner did it." Ueki, in a swift fluid motion, locked the clerk's arm behind his back and shoved him toward the elevator.

"Where are you taking me?" The clerk was no longer grinning.

Ueki did not reply. The elevator door opened at the third floor and Ueki pushed the clerk into the nearest massage room, then released him. "Get into the steam chair," he ordered, pointing.

The clerk cowered. "No!"

Ueki drew his service revolver and held the muzzle against the man's temple. "The chair. Now."

The man obeyed.

Ueki folded the halves into place and turned the steam valve as far as it would go. "I assume that the same person who hurt Miyako—or had her harmed—brought prostitutes to work here," he said. "There will be few customers here for some time in view of our raid, so you have ample time to provide me with names."

The clerk didn't answer. We stood in silence for several minutes, watching rivers of sweat run down his face.

"Please!" he pleaded.

"Who? Ueki asked again.

The clerk began panting, struggling for breath. "All right, I will tell you what I know," he said, "but turn off the steam, I beg you." I twisted the valve, smiling pleasantly at the clerk.

"I am paid only to keep track of the customers and to collect the money," he whined. "I have never seen the man in charge, although I know his name. One of the girls told me she saw him leaving the room where Miyako Inoue was found."

"Well?" Ueki urged. "Give me the name." He gestured toward the steam valve, and I reached toward it.

"His name," the clerk said, "is Masaharu Kono."

"Ah, domo arigato gozaimashita," Ueki growled with exaggerated politeness. Thank you so much for all past services. We turned and walked out of the room.

"Please, let me out!" the clerk screamed as the elevator doors opened. We ignored him and descended to the lobby, where Ueki's men were

waiting. "There is a creature in a steam chair on the third floor," Ueki instructed them. "Take him in for questioning." He drove me back to the hospital parking lot and we went in to check on Miyako.

"No change," we were told.

Although it was past midnight, Noriko had waited up, anxious to learn what had happened. Ueki pulled into the driveway as I was entering the house and the three of us went to the family room together. Noriko sat crosslegged on a throw rug while Ueki and I took our accustomed sofa seats.

"Do you know this Masaharu Kono?" she asked after Ueki had given her a summary of the night's events.

"Unfortunately," the inspector replied, "I do know of him. He is a gangster and a vicious one." He paused. "Noriko, could we please have a snack and some green tea?" She went to the kitchen to return shortly with a plate of dried salted fish, a teapot, and three cups.

"After the war," Ueki said, "Kono made a fortune in black-market rice. Sometime during the Korean War he branched out into gambling, prostitution, and extortion." He crunched on the fish. "He was arrested and sent to prison sometime back and served perhaps five or six years."

"And now," I said, "he seems to be back in business."

"Yes, but with the information about Miyako Inoue we may be able to put him away again—permanently if she dies." Ueki rose. "I will be in touch as soon as I discuss the matter with my superiors."

We accompanied him to his car. "Oyasumi nasai." Good night.

I was signing some new contracts for Goto-san to process when Ueki appeared at the office door. "Isogashi desuka?" Are you busy?

"No, come on in," I said. Ueki sat down, crossed his legs, and lit a cigarette.

"Sam, the problems with Masaharu Kono are more extensive than I thought. He has taken over several of the nightclubs, bringing in prostitutes." He paused and looked out the window. "Worse, however, he also is bringing drugs into Okayama. I have some undercover men, the long-haired ikasu types, and they have been able to purchase amphetamines at three of the largest clubs."

That was serious. While the Japanese showed relatively little interest in marijuana or heroin, the hectic industrial pace of their society had

made the "speed" drugs an understandable, but highly illegal, preference. In the larger cities there had been a dramatic increase in drug-related crimes and accidents.

"I understand the problem, Toshiko. What do you plan to do?"

Ueki reached over for an ashtray on my desk and stubbed out his cigarette. "In the past, Sam, most illicit drugs have been smuggled in from Hong Kong and Taipei. But now some of our informants tell us that Kono has made connections in Hawaii. He is there now, and we even know where he is staying."

"Where?"

"A place called Makaha. I believe you are familiar with it." He smiled.

I was. Noriko and I had spent our honeymoon there. I made my decision on the spot.

"Toshiko, I think the two of us should have a little vacation on the lovely island of Oahu."

He nodded in agreement. "I hoped you would say that. I, of course, will have no authority outside of Japan, but we may at least discover where Kono is obtaining the drugs and how they are being brought into this country."

"Fine. Goto-san can mind the store for a while. How soon will your passport and visa be ready?"

Ueki removed a packet of papers from his jacket pocket and held it in front of my eyes.

After my farewells with a tearful and slightly jealous Noriko, I met Ueki at the Okayama Station and we took the bullet train to Osaka, then traveled by bus to the airport. We passed through a rigid security check and boarded our flight to Tokyo. The pilot received taxi clearance, eased the porpoise-headed 747 to the end of the runway, applied full power with the brakes on, and then released them, beginning the fifty-five-second race to leave the ground.

The inspector, I noticed, was gripping the armrests tightly. "First time in the air, Toshiko?"

He gave me a rueful smile. "Yes."

I consoled him. "The only really dangerous moments are the first few minutes after takeoff and before landing."

He relaxed slightly, and then a loud boom reverberated through the aircraft. Then another. And another. Neither of us spoke. I tried to appear

unconcerned as I turned the pages of a magazine. The captain's voice came over the intercom, apologizing for the racket made by a faulty nose-wheel cover banging in the airstream.

I grinned at Ueki. "That should make you feel better."

"One can only wonder," Ueki mused, "why the captain did not mention whether the problem is trivial."

I ordered drinks—doubles.

Our flight to Honolulu didn't depart until the next morning and the airline provided a free overnight stay at the Narita International Hotel, a fifteen-minute bus ride from the airport. We registered, went to our room, cleaned up, and decided to try the restaurant. I was looking through the menu when Ueki gave a sharp cry of pleasure, rose abruptly, and hurried across the room.

As I sat there, surprised, I saw him greet a man sitting by himself at a window table overlooking the golf course. There was much bowing. They both turned to look at me, then Ueki returned to our table with the other man. I stood up.

"Sam Brent, this is my very dear old friend, Tetsuo Akiyama."

I bowed. "Dozo yoroshiku." Nice to meet you. Akiyama joined us and a waiter took our orders for food and drinks.

I learned that Akiyama and the inspector had met aboard ship when they were on their way to the University of Oregon as exchange students. Akiyama, some twelve years older than Ueki at the age of fifty-nine, had been an attorney until he decided on an academic career, and had become a leading specialist in the historical jurisprudence of Japan.

I took an instant liking to him. There was the gentle quiet aura of the dedicated scholar about him and his manner of speech indicated that he'd succeeded in meeting life on its own terms. The dinner dishes were cleared away and we offered only token objections when Akiyama suggested another drink. Akiyama told us that he was on his way to Hawaii for a brief vacation; this information led to the fact that all of us were on the same flight. In the mellowness of good companionship Ueki and I convinced the professor that he should cancel his reservations in downtown Honolulu and be our guest at the Makaha Towers Apartments. Whatever ritual protests Akiyama might have made vanished when Ueki explained the purpose of our trip. "Curiosity forces me to impose," he said . . .

"There is something about Akiyama-san that few people know," Ueki told me as we prepared for bed.

"Yes?"

"He is one of the few surviving kamikaze pilots."

"Akiyama-san? It's difficult to believe such an accomplished scholar could have been a suicide pilot."

Ueki frowned. "Suicide, perhaps, is the wrong word. At any rate, as a young soldier in the Japanese Imperial Army Akiyama was one of a group of volunteers trained in the Philippines. He was scheduled to fly against the American fleet involved in the recapture of Manila."

"What happened?"

"His airplane crashed on takeoff. He was thrown clear, but his injuries were severe enough to keep him out of the rest of the war, and he was fortunate enough to be on one of the few transports that returned to Japan safely."

Strange. One man lives, another dies. I turned off the lights and we slept.

We were seated together on the eight-hour flight from Tokyo to Honolulu. Ueki dozed. I asked Akiyama if he minded discussing his experiences in the war. "Of course not, Mr. Brent. I have written many philosophical articles about that war. I am always willing to share my experiences—what I learned." He looked out the window at the white clouds far below. "Is there something in particular you would like to know?"

"Hai, sensei." Yes, professor. "Why would anyone volunteer to die so horribly, without even the slightest chance of survival?"

Akiyama adjusted his seat and leaned back. "We older Japanese, those of my generation, were taught from earliest childhood that the Emperor was a divine being and that his orders also were divine. For us, he *was* Japan, and total unquestioning obedience was expected and given. As kamikaze volunteers, we were told that we were being given the honor of dying for a divine cause—the very word 'kamikaze' means divine wind."

He gave me a gentle smile. "Do you find that hard to believe?"

"No, sensei. I think the soldiers of all armies are told that the noblest death of all is for one's country."

Akiyama sighed. "Today I am much older. I believe now that it is better

to live for one another than to be so willing to surrender our souls for slogans."

The captain directed our attention to Diamond Head as we made our approach to Honolulu International Airport. We debarked, rode the waiting buses to the Customs area, and were checked through quickly. In the main terminal, I called to cancel Akiyama's hotel reservation.

Ueki, looking about eagerly, commented, "This reminds me of Tokyo." He pointed to all of the bilingual signs, Japanese and English.

"So do all those tourist groups carrying cameras," I added. "Incidentally, sensei," I remarked to Akiyama, "I'm surprised you didn't come with a tourist party."

"At the risk of seeming immodest, I have reached a point in life where I am as comfortable with myself as with others."

We proceeded to the car-rental area and I chose a model large enough to transport the three of us and our luggage. Ueki reached down and patted the top of the small car the attendant drove out for us. "I expected a limousine."

"When you pay," I retorted, "you get a limousine." Akiyama found that amusing.

I took H1 west, skirting Pearl, then picked up the old Farrington Highway near Ewa, driving north past Nanakuli and Mailie to Waianae, where I parked the car on the roadside next to the beach.

"Beautiful," Akiyama said. "Simply beautiful."

I pointed to the mountains on our right. "If you look carefully you can see where we'll be staying." There, apparently built into the sides of the mountains, were the Makaha Towers Apartments. I drove through the valley and up the winding road past the golf course and the Makaha Inn, stopping at the security post leading into the complex. The guard checked my name against a list, then entered the names of my companions as additional guests. From my previous stay, I knew the keys would be ready at the main office.

Dorothy Matsuo, the manager, greeted us warmly. On our two-week honeymoon Noriko and I had become fond of the cheerful Japanese-American lady, and had sent her a number of gifts from Japan.

"Sam, it's nice to have you back," she said after the introductions were made, "but I gather this is a business trip."

It was, I said, and briefly explained.

"Kono? I'm not surprised. He and two others rented an apartment for a week. They're obnoxious loudmouths—treat the staff like dirt. It will be my pleasure to help any way I can." She took off her glasses and rubbed her eyes while leafing through a folder. "I'm going to put you in Apartment 303. It's larger than the one I held for you, and the telephone is still connected. I'll get in touch with our security people and they'll help keep you posted." She opened a drawer and removed a ledger, flipping it open toward the end. "The two men registered with Kono are Ralph Hashida and Bill Lane, both of Honolulu. Is that enough information to get you started?"

I thanked her and we were walking out of the office when Dorothy called me back.

"Sam," she said softly, "there's not going to be any charge for the apartment. Stay as long as you need."

"That's not necessary, Dorothy."

"It is. My oldest boy spent two years in a Mexican prison for trying to smuggle dope. Maybe for someone like Kono."

There was a kitchen, a living room, a master bedroom with two single beds, a bath, and a smaller bedroom with a queen-size bed. Ueki and I chose the larger bedroom and Akiyama took the other.

I unzipped my small carry-on bag and removed a bottle of the Japanese scotch whiskey whose taste appealed so much to me.

"Ah!" Ueki shouted with delight as I went to the kitchen for glasses and ice.

"You too, sensei?" I asked Akiyama.

"Hai, domo," he answered. Yes, thanks.

"Now, Tōshiko, if you'll carry two of these glasses I'll show you the height of luxury." I drew the curtains and unlocked the glass door leading to the lanai and the marble-top table and chairs. We sat and drank, luxuriating in the view of the mountains, the distant ocean, and the beds of tropical flowers surrounding the complexes.

"This is so pleasantly unexpected," Akiyama said. "I will never be able to repay you." No reply was required; Ueki and I both knew that once we returned to Japan Akiyama would arrange something for us far out of proportion to our simple gesture of friendship.

"The important question now," Ueki wondered, "is what we do next?"

"Wait," I suggested. "Dorothy Matsuo is an extremely competent person and we should hear something soon."

We did. One of the security guards called and reported that Kono and the other two men had driven to the Makaha Inn, a short distance away. I opened my two-suiter and removed an aloha shirt—bright green—and a pair of red walking shorts. "So I'll look like a typical American tourist," I explained. "It would be best if you wear slacks and shirts, no tie, no jacket. No one in Hawaii dresses up and we don't want to attract attention to ourselves."

"Sometimes," Ueki commented to Akiyama, "my son-in-law forgets that he is the businessman and I am the detective."

We crowded into the car and drove to the inn. Ueki had shown us police photographs of Kono and we soon spotted him sitting at a table near the buffet with the other two men. I learned a long time ago not to judge people by superficial characteristics, but Kono was unattractive by anyone's standards, with dandruff-flecked oily hair, a prominent nose that hooked to one side, and a face that hadn't felt a razor's touch in several days.

Ueki caught my train of thought. "Kowaii, ne?" Ugly, isn't he?

We asked the hostess for a table near Kono's and I ordered something touristy—Mai Tais. Kono looked in our direction several times, but saw only three tourists—Ueki and I talking trivia in English, Akiyama feigning full comprehension with an occasional laugh or nod of the head. We chose from the salad bar while Kono and his friends had steak. When they left, we followed them back to the Towers.

"A waste of time," I complained back in the apartment.

"Perhaps not," Ueki countered. "I am sure you noticed that Kono spoke no English and Lane no Japanese. The third man, the Japanese-American, spoke both. Hashida's presence has been necessary for the negotiations, and the fact that they all shook hands after eating suggests they reached an agreement."

I had been too busy looking casual to notice any of that. "Yes, it was quite obvious, Toshiko. We may be getting close."

"Indeed."

"Exciting and interesting," Akiyama yawned, "but it has been a tiring day and my youth is far in the past. Good night."

I placed an overseas call to Noriko and asked her to tell Mrs. Ueki we were well. By the time Ueki came out of the shower I had some pleasant news. Miyako Inoue had come out of the coma and was recovering without complications.

I was still groggy when Dorothy Matsuo called early in the morning. Hashida, she said, had come to the office and told her the apartment would be vacated by noon. I rolled out of bed and shook Ueki. I asked Dorothy if she could find out if Kono had travel plans. Yes, she said, an agency was located at the inn. I hung up the phone, went to the kitchen, and put on a kettle of water for coffee while I relayed the information to Ueki. Akiyama came out of the other bedroom and joined us.

Dorothy phoned back in ten minutes. Hashida had picked up Kono's reservations on a flight to Tokyo departing that afternoon.

"Do you want me to try to get you on that flight?" she inquired.

"Hold on, Dorothy." I passed the ball to Ueki.

"Yes," he said, "we must follow and hope for evidence. As of now we simply do not know who has the drugs or how they will be taken into Japan." He turned to Akiyama. "It seems that we must depart, but you are welcome to remain, sensei. This was, after all, to be a vacation."

Akiyama laughed. "I would rather see the remainder of this adventure."

I asked Dorothy if she could get us booked on Kono's flight.

Thanks in part to increased fuel costs there were some vacancies.

It took us only a short while to put our belongings together for another trip. Ueki went to the office and talked to Dorothy while Akiyama and I straightened up the apartment. When we arrived at the office, Dorothy was on the telephone to the Honolulu Police Department. Ueki had suggested a meeting to see what could be done with Lane and Hashida.

Lieutenant Tom Blincoe listened to our information, asked us to wait, and walked across the busy squad room, where he gave instructions to one of the uniformed men.

"O.K., gentlemen," he said when he sat down behind the desk again. "What you tell me makes sense. Lane is a known pusher, but we didn't know he'd moved onto the international scene." He took a print-out from an officer who approached his desk. "Nothing on this Hashida fellow."

From what you say, there's no way of telling if the dope is actually going aboard that plane. So we'll try a little psychology. I'll have Lane and Hashida picked up after you're on your way and tell them we know all about it. There's a chance one of them will talk, try to make a deal. I'll arrange to radio a message to your flight and you may be able to nail Kono at the other end. Are you sure you don't want us to arrest him here?"

"Thank you, but no," Ueki said. "If we can find the evidence he will receive a much more severe penalty in Japan because of his record."

"All right, then. Thank you—I hope this works out for all of us."

I drove to the airport and turned in the rental.

Kono was solidly in view two rows ahead of us. The stewardesses had distributed hot towels and were taking orders for refreshments. The seat-belt signs were turned off and the captain told us we were free to walk about the cabin. Most of the passengers on the Japanese airliner seemed to be businessmen, with a scattering of tourists, including a number of couples and their children.

Ueki was opening a pack of cigarettes when we were startled by an intercom request in Japanese: "Would Inspector Toshiko Ueki please come forward for a radio message?" I tried to shrink in the seat, as did Akiyama, when Kono turned around and stared in our direction. Ueki removed his seat belt and, with icy calm, strolled forward, ignoring Kono's scrutiny.

"I think the captain did not know Kono is aboard," Akiyama whispered. Wherever the fault lay, Kono hurried out into the aisle after Ueki passed by, talking in a low agitated voice to one of the stewardesses. With obvious reluctance she opened an upright compartment in the bulkhead, rummaged around, and handed Kono a brown package, which he took with him into one of the unoccupied lavatories.

"I must warn Ueki-san," Akiyama said. "I have a bad feeling about this." He stepped into the aisle just as Ueki returned.

"Kono wa doko desuka?" Where is Kono?

Akiyama pointed to the lavatory just as Kono came dashing out. There were gasps from some of the passengers. Kono held an automatic in his hand, pointed directly at Ueki.

"You," he snarled, "sit down. Filthy cop." He ignored Akiyama standing tensely quiet a few meters down the aisle. The chief steward and another

male crew member appeared at the bulkhead, but retreated quickly when Kono waved the gun at them.

"Be reasonable," Ueki urged in a calm voice.

"You know about the drugs."

"Yes. Hashida has told us everything, including how you planned to smuggle in handguns along with the drugs. It would be best for you to hand me that weapon now."

"Too bad, Mr. Inspector," Kono rasped. "I would rather die than go to prison again. And you will die with me—all of you."

I tensed as two youngsters, unaware of the danger, came skipping down the aisle. As Kono pointed the gun at a window I tore at the seat-buckle and lurched forward. The gun fired once, and I had a fleeting glimpse of Kono, bent double as he was carried through the gaping window space by the explosive decompression. I managed to grab the children and Ueki held me around the waist with both arms as the escaping air howled around us.

And then we saw him—Akiyama. His body was jammed into the opening where the window had blown out, his arms and legs outstretched and braced in a moment of superhuman strength as he shouted for the passengers to buckle up, to hold onto something. He remained fixed in that position for no more than two or three seconds, then vanished forever. Ueki maintained his secure grip on me as the aircraft went into a steep dive, finally leveling out at an altitude where we would not freeze or have to rely further on the oxygen masks dangling from the ceiling.

The pilot returned us to Honolulu safely.

"An incredible story in every sense," Dorothy Matsuo said after the long session with Lieutenant Blincoe and our late arrival back at the Towers for what we felt was some needed rest.

"Yes," Ueki said. "The two stewardesses who consented to smuggle in drugs and weapons are in a Honolulu jail. Once they serve prison terms here they will face them again in Japan. Mr. Lane refused to cooperate, but Hashida was frightened and gave Blincoe the whole story."

As regular crew members, the stewardesses received only cursory checks at Japanese Customs, and had put the drugs and several guns in the large black-plastic clothes bags they carried. Hand luggage might be checked routinely, but the garment bags seldom received attention. Each stewardess had agreed to carry the items, obtained from Lane, at least

twice a month. The handguns would bring a higher price than the drugs in Japan, which has the strictest weapons control in the world.

Dorothy looked at us both closely. "I know how you must feel about Professor Akiyama."

Ueki rubbed his hand through his hair. "I shall always wonder if he placed himself near that window deliberately once he knew Kono's intentions."

"We'll never know that," I said. "But Akiyama was truly heroic in those last moments. Something of that divine wind was with him then."

"There is a world of difference between suicidal death like Kono's and self-sacrifice," Ueki observed, "but I am too simple a man to explain it."

I started to reply and found I couldn't. I excused myself, went to the bedroom, and called Noriko.

Ueki and Dorothy were conversing quietly when I completed the call.

"Dorothy, did the inspector ever tell you that I had to wait until just before I married his daughter before he asked me to call him by his first name?"

"Well," she laughed, "I've heard something about the custom of slow-building friendship."

"Now," I continued, "I have another name for him." I stirred my drink with a finger.

Ueki fixed me with an alert look. "And what might that be?"

"Grandfather. In about six months, according to Noriko."

His mouth opened and his dark intense eyes filled with delight.

We toasted each other all the way back to Japan.

The November 11 Issue of *Alfred Hitchcock's
Mystery Magazine* will be on sale October 15.

Darby was known as "Messenger's Boy" . . .

PROFESSIONAL COURTESY by HERSCHEL COZINE



I recognized Matt Samson immediately, although I'd never met him. He walked into the lounge of the casino with the stealth of a cat stalking its prey. His lean frame was as tense as a spring, ready to react to the slightest movement.

To the layman he was just another face in the crowd. He'd turn a few feminine heads, I thought enviously, but he wasn't the type who would draw attention to himself just by walking into a room. To me, however,

Matt Samson stood out like a sore thumb. We're in the same profession and, as the old saying goes, it takes one to know one.

He works for Jake Barry, head of probably the most powerful organization in the Southeast. Barry claimed territorial rights in that area in the Fifties and successfully protected those rights for almost thirty years. Matt Samson was a big factor in that success.

I work for Fred Messenger and it follows that I would be known as "Messenger's Boy." The appellation doesn't bother me. There's always an implied reverence when someone uses the name.

Samson had asked for this meeting and arranged it through a mutual contact. I was surprised and a little dubious. It's unusual—O.K., unheard of—for rivals in our business to reveal ourselves to one another, or to anyone else for that matter. My first reaction was to decline the invitation. But in a way I'd encouraged it. If he was willing I saw no reason to object—he was taking as great a risk as I was.

I motioned to him by lifting a little finger from my glass. He caught it, as I knew he would, and made his way through the crowd, stopping long enough to order a drink from the miniskirted waitress, then joining me in the booth at the back of the room.

We didn't shake hands. He kept his on the table, close to his chest. So did I. Old habits are hard to break.

"Darby?"

I nodded.

"I've heard a lot about you," he said, and I knew he meant it as a compliment.

"Legends," I said modestly.

He laughed. It was an easy pleasant laugh, more suited to subjects other than the one we were discussing. "Like Al Carson in Chicago?"

It was my turn to laugh. Carson was one of my best jobs. I had penetrated a security that rivaled the guarding of the Crown Jewels to get to him. And when I'd caught up to him in the bowels of an underground garage I'd picked him off while he was surrounded by six bodyguards. By the time they reacted I was gone.

"Why did you want to see me?" I said.

He waited while the waitress placed a drink in front of him, threw a five on the tray, and waved off the change. "The word's out about Doran."

I nodded. "And they think I'm the hired gun?"

Samson eyed me with a hard stare. "Hell, there's nobody else Mes-

senger would trust with this one." He lifted the glass to his lips and swallowed. Setting the glass directly over the wet ring it had made on the table, he sat back and draped an arm over the chair.

"Where do you come in?" I asked.

He didn't answer my question directly. "He's Barry's right arm, you know," he said.

I shrugged. "If I was going to do the job I wouldn't be in Reno. He's in Miami."

"Three hours by jet," Samson said. "You're not talking to an amateur, Darby. I've used that trick myself. Remember Nick Ballantine?"

I remembered. He was killed in New York on the morning of May sixteenth. Samson was reportedly in L.A. at the time. But careful scheduling can create incredible illusions if you know what you're doing. "Sorry," I mumbled.

Samson leaned forward and folded his arms on the table. "Messenger's making a big mistake."

"Is that your opinion or Barry's?"

"Does it matter?"

I studied my knuckles. "No. And it doesn't matter what I think either—I don't call the shots."

"I won't ask you to do something I wouldn't do myself," Samson said. "You have your orders, whatever they are, and I suppose you'll go through with it. You always have."

"Then why are you here?"

He shrugged. "Professional courtesy." And the look in his eye told me what he meant.

I've known fear before in my chosen profession—it goes with the territory—but it's a constructive fear that fine-tunes the reflexes and alerts the brain. It has saved my life on more than one occasion.

I felt a tug of that fear now as I stared into Samson's compelling eyes. But the news was not unexpected, only the means by which I received it.

"Do you make a habit of having a drink with your victims?"

He gave a pensive smile and shook his head. "And I'm not sure I'm doing the right thing now."

I resisted the urge to laugh. Samson's meeting with me, no matter how unusual or ill-conceived it seemed, had been carefully orchestrated. He knew exactly what he was doing.

"But this isn't an ordinary assignment," he went on. "I've been an admirer of yours for years. I've let myself develop an empathy for my target." He shook his head. "But that's not really my fault. The empathy was there before the assignment. There's not much I can do about that."

I understood what he meant. Rule number one in our profession is simple. Don't develop feelings one way or the other for your victim. Hate is as detrimental as sympathy because it makes you act out of emotion.

"Well," I said, "that's *your* problem. But it won't stop you from doing your job. I know the rules." I studied Samson's face. "Speaking of rules," I said, "Barry's violating a basic one right now."

The rule I was speaking of was not inviolate, but it was seldom broken. Hit men are rarely objects of contract killing, they're merely extensions of the weapons they use and not individuals in their own right. Not that they don't get killed, but most of the time it's in the line of duty—self-defense or retaliation if the job isn't done according to Hoyle. First of all, it's a matter of economics. For every hit man that's lost there are a dozen ready to take his place. I may be worth three others, but none of us is indispensable.

And we're a fraternity of sorts. It's not pleasant to kill one of your own. It's a no-win situation with repayment in kind that could lead to wholesale slaughter. The publicity is bad for the mob. They like to keep a low profile.

Barry was breaking the unwritten code of ethics by putting a contract on me before I'd done anything to warrant it.

Samson knew what I meant. "Yeah," he said. "But it's a grey area. When the other guy goes for big game like Doran, drastic steps have to be taken to protect him. We watch out for our own."

"I suppose you're right," I said. "But Doran stepped on Messenger's toes." I shook my head. "Hell, what difference does it make now? I've got a job to do and so do you. Good luck to one of us." I stood up. "Thanks for the warning."

He lifted a hand in response and toyed with his drink. I suddenly felt sorry for him.

Leaving the casino, I hailed a cab. I got in and directed the driver to a motel in a quieter part of town, if there is such a place in Reno. I'd be followed, I knew that, and I imagined the goons who were following me would be surprised to find I wasn't going to the airport. I wasn't sure

where Samson was planning to do the job, but an airport parking lot is as good a place as any. He was probably on his way there now.

But he wouldn't take anything for granted. He'd keep in touch with the guys following me. I sat back and closed my eyes.

Messenger knew that a contract on Doran couldn't be kept secret. There were too many people involved and it only takes one slip to blow the whole plan. So he had to resort to deception.

Once the word was out, Barry would act to protect his man. It would be impossible to keep Doran from getting killed if I were the one doing the killing. I proved that in Chicago. So they'd decided to get to me before I had a chance at Doran. Samson's talk with me was an attempt to scare me off. His concern was genuine. He had no stomach for his assignment any more that I would have if the roles were reversed. But he wouldn't hesitate to carry it out if it came to that.

I looked in the rearview mirror. A grey late-model car was following at a discreet distance. My tail. I allowed myself a smile. If everything went according to plan Doran was dead by now.

Messenger had decided to send Ben Jackson instead of me to eliminate Doran. Ben was good. With Samson out of the picture he'd get the job done.

That's where I came in. I had to keep Samson occupied while Ben was doing his job. But I played it fair. I never once told Samson I was the one who was going to waste Doran. But I had no obligation to tell him *I wasn't*. If he drew the wrong conclusions from what he heard and saw it was nobody's fault but his own.

The beauty of it was that once Doran had been eliminated while I was half a continent away at the exact moment of the hit—with one of their own men as a witness—I was safe. They'd call off the contract.

I felt good again, as much for Samson as for myself.



The manner of the break-in ruled out vandals . . .

DEAD SIMPLE

by
JEFFERY
SCOTT



Plainclothes seemed the wrong label for what Detective-Sergeant Cordery was wearing. His barrel chest strained the T-shirt, which had GRATEFUL DEAD blazoned front and back. Surely not meant for disguise—Tom Cordery, transparently respectable if rough-edged, was far too old to make a viable fan.

Detective-Constable Henneker, aka “Young Mick here” or “you,” had to keep glancing away hastily to maintain a straight face.

The explanation was that Mrs. Detective-Sergeant Cordery had gone to see her mother in Edinburgh, always a long job. Mrs. Cordery was unliberated and her husband no feminist—he imagined that shirts washed themselves perhaps. In any event, he'd virtuously placed his clothes in the bathroom linen basket and was mortified after a week or more to discover them still there. Now he was reduced to plundering his nineteen-year old son's wardrobe, which was unsuitable but surprisingly extensive and clean. His son knew about the launderette.

Cordery was enjoying Mick Henneker's bafflement. He had a weird sense of humor, ranging from childlike to caustic.

He poked Henneker in the ribs. "Heads up, young Mick. Here he comes—the Napoleon of crime. Your chum."

D-C Henneker dropped his newspaper half an inch and groaned. Something had appeared at the far end of Lockmonger Row. It looked a little like a giant toadstool, the pallid kind springing up and vanishing in a single day, but was a thin man in a very large flat cap. Either his raincoat was too long or his legs too short for it.

A silly name, Algy Weak. D-C Henneker was hungry, as the saying goes, and had the reputation of talking to anyone who might burnish his arrest record, but even he drew the line at Algy. Most citizens of Drinsford, that half-Cockney suburb jammed between London and the real countryside, felt the same way. Algy had a host of nicknames, many ribald or pointed, of which "Wet" Weak was the kindest.

For some reason, or more likely no good reason at all, he had taken a great fancy to Mick Henneker. Algy Weak was a grass, a police informer, in a vague and ill-directed manner. He got things backwards or askew. When he got them halfway right it tended to be long after the event. Backwards, bent, or belated, for weeks he had been pressing his dubious offerings on Drinsford's newest CID man.

Cordery and D-C Henneker were spying—"keeping observation," in the kinder jargon—on a suspect house in Lockmonger Row when the pest arrived. Lockmonger Row is a remnant of Eighteenth Century Drinsford, when the place was a hamlet half a day's ride from Hyde Park Corner and fashionable London. Leading nowhere, without a pub or a shop, it was a rotten neighborhood for lingering casually. They'd made the best of a bad job by parking Cordery's private car, a disreputable third-hand Saab, on the double yellow lines decreeing no parking before raising the hood and pretending to be waiting for a tow.

Mike Henneker raised his newspaper again, hoping Algy Weak hadn't seen them. All right, he admitted, ears burning, seen *him*. "It's for you, dahlings," Sergeant Cordery cooed as the footsteps scuffed nearer. "Beware the Weak when he comes bearing gifts."

"Ha-bloody-ha."

"That's no way to get on in the Force," Cordery pointed out. And louder, "Morning, Wet."

"Hello Sarge, Mr. Henneker sir." An eager baying, the voice of a loser perpetually shifting from foot to foot and wriggling even when stock still. "I can do you a favor, gents. If you're hanging about to catch Tiger Green, he did a bunk from round here last Wednesday."

Mick Henneker, furious, opened his mouth but the bored Sergeant Cordery hacked him on the ankle. Philip "Tiger" Green, a minor yet persistent local villain, had indeed done a bunk, but permanently. He'd been killed in a road accident, not the previous week but nearly a month earlier.

Cordery, facing Weak, was silky. "How about that? You saw him then, me old Algy?"

"That I did." Weak became important, even his limply luxuriant moustache perking up a bit. He pointed to a dispirited Victorian-Gothic building, its windows boarded up. "He was loading gear into a van outside the Baptist chapel there."

Henneker started to tell Algy to shove off and stop trying to kid his betters when an iron bar—the Sergeant's arm—pressed him back against the car.

"Are you sure it was Tiger Green?" Cordery asked earnestly.

"He was close to me as you are," Algy replied. "Only for a second, as I walked past, but it was him. Putting a tool-bag like plumbers carry into his motor. Not best pleased to see *me*, he wasn't, neither. Early it was—about six ay hem. Doing a bunk, any fool could tell."

Cordery beamed at him. "Well, you're that, Wet, so it's conclusive. Tiger Green rides again. Ta for the tip." Money changed hands, not much but the amount to which Weak was accustomed. He scurried away to his secular shrines, the pub and betting shop in the High Street round the corner.

Mick Henneker was resentful. "I know I'm raw and all that, but Tiger Green's been six foot under for a month now. Why pay Wet Weak for seeing a ghost?"

"Give over," snapped Cordery. "Go on, get in the car." He backed up with such urgency that they nearly rammed a red double-decker bus as the Saab erupted out of Lockmongers Row.

Detective-Superintendent Dunstable heard Cordery's tale. Dunstable's face was the color, texture, and shape of an inverted gravestone. It failed to alter expression, but his voice conveyed a spark of grudging interest. "Your informant, Weak, he's reliable?"

"Useless," Cordery contradicted cheerfully. "But he's good on faces, sir. If he says he spotted Tiger Green—er, he's not my informant, sir. Young Henneker's been cultivating him."

The gravestone tilted a trifle. "Give up, Tom. All your geese are swans, all your D-Cs are fliers. Algy Weak doesn't have to be cultivated, he grows on new boys like mould."

"Can't blame me for trying, I had a good example." Cordery grinned. Unlikely as it seemed from that Easter Island aura, Superintendent Dunstable had done much the same for him in earlier days.

Dunstable sniffed austere, his little eyes evasive. "That's as maybe. What next?"

"I'd like a search warrant for that chapel."

The Superintendent stared at the wall. "Huh. Shy bird, Sammy Carfax. Lots of friends. Lots of information. We get a warrant, go in with a big song and dance, he'll likely hear of it. As things stand, he's been away from this patch for, what, five or six years? We never knew he'd come back. I'd rather he thought we still don't know. The chapel, now. Up for sale, I seem to recall. Derelict, more or less."

"And we haven't had this conversation, sir," Sergeant Cordery agreed resignedly.

"What conversation would that be, Tom?" Dunstable managed to sound at a loss. Shaking his head, Cordery went out.

As soon as the door closed, Dunstable was on the phone to Perilea Central Police Station, where he had a friend. Perilea, 200 miles from London, is one of those new towns plonked down beside a motorway. The idea was that factories would open, hiring people flushed and nagged out of inner-city slums in Scotland and the Midlands. Nothing happened, Perilea has stopped holding its breath, and the growth industry is unemployment.

Tiger Green had died at Perilea.

"Philip Terence Green, forty years of age," the Superintendent recited drearily. "Could you fill in some background for me, Ron? Nothing official, as yet, just my morbid curiosity. And I was sitting here wondering who I could pester, so I thought, what I'll do is pester old Ron."

"You're full of what makes the grass grow, Sid," his opposite number responded. "I *thought* that accident was dodgy, but the Forensic boys wouldn't have it."

"Come again, Ronnie?"

"Leave off, Sid—I'm wearing out up here in yokel country, not rusting. I can still smell a dodgy one. You taught me."

"O.K. Philip Terence Green—his car went off an overpass, dropped thirty feet, and burst into flames when it landed on waste ground. The overpass is straight. The surface was a bit greasy but for that motor to go through mild-steel guard rails it must have been traveling a hell of a clip."

"One victim, the aforesaid Philip Green. Burnt to a cinder, but we have his dentures, watch, so forth. Very intense fire. Forensics say he was carrying a spare can of petrol in the back. Well, we had a tanker-drivers' strike in these parts at the time, people driving up from down South were taking precautions."

"There's a 'but' hanging around there," Dunstable prompted.

"Oh, you're too sharp for me," Superintendent Ronaldson countered with mock admiration. "Yes, we found a house brick in the wreckage. Fair enough, it was waste ground, maybe it belonged there. Also maybe Mr. Green was dead when the car went over, the throttle jammed open with that brick."

Superintendent Ronaldson paused invitingly but got only a sceptical grunt. "Then there was the matter of Green's antecedents," he went on.

"Antecedents?"

"Sid, we're on the same side, don't try to kid me. I checked the deceased's criminal record. That's part of why I think the death was dodgy. A criminal dies violently, accident or no, you look harder, right? And Green had form—heavy stuff in the Sixties, robbery with violence, did time. A couple more arrests, no convictions."

"All right, his recent record was petty. It happens: bloke gets older, can't do his porridge, loses his nerve."

Or his partner. Superintendent Dunstable didn't relay the suggestion. Ronaldson was plaintive. "What's the game, Sid?"

"No game, Ron, only some passing doubts. Probably nothing in it. What was the inquest verdict?"

"It's been adjourned—that was my doing. But I can't stall much longer."

Ignoring the implicit appeal, Dunstable asked, "The car wreckage, I suppose that went for scrap once the Forensic people finished?"

Ronaldson cursed, making the receiver crackle. "I knew it! Cough up, Sid, you're onto something. No, I've got the car under a tarp in our garage here."

Dunstable smoothed the pointed end of the gravestone. "Look, I'm in the dark like you. But just for a laugh get the Forensic gang back. Make 'em check the wheels and tires. Could have been a blowout sent him over the edge—I haven't any faith in your brick, Ron. Listen, pal, I've got this very important conference and I'm late. Thanks for the chat."

Superintendent Ronaldson was swearing again as his colleague hung up.

Sergeant Cordery was in a good mood, Mick Henneker a bad one, as they stood in the main part of the Baptist chapel at Lockmonger Row.

It seemed larger than one would expect from outside. Varnished pine pews were jumbled at one end. The long high space was cool and smelt, not unpleasantly, of mildewed paper and paraffin lamps.

Cordery, balking at breaking into the place, had talked winningly to the estate agent who'd had the chapel on his books for the last eighteen months. They were here by invitation, then, which was nice. But somebody else, and recently, had entered without permission. The boards across the rear door had been nailed back, but the antique lock behind the timber was a smashed ruin, crowbar scratches still bright.

"Which rules out vandals, kids out to mess the place up for the hell of it," Cordery lectured. "Or a tramp looking for a hideaway to sleep. They might push the boards back, looking to use the place another time, but they'd never have a hammer ready, and fresh nails."

The Sergeant gave Henneker a love-tap on the shoulder, making him yelp and stagger, rousing sodden echoes. "You did note that the planks over the back windows were put in with six-inch nails, grid pattern on the heads, whereas in addition to a few twisted six-inches in the door planks they've been nailed home again with four inch, plain-head nails?"

"I don't know how you do it, Sarge."

"What's the matter, Sunshine?" Cordery hunkered down just inside

the back door, resting on his heels. He spoke abstractedly, his gaze sweeping the chapel.

Mick Henneker gestured pettishly. "I seem to have lost my place. Wet Weak spins us a pack of lies about seeing a ghost and suddenly we're dashing off in all directions. We're *supposed* to be keeping obbo on Number 20, far end of the Row, so what's so interesting about this dump?"

"It's the dump Tiger Green was seen leaving, and not empty-handed, son," Cordery explained patiently.

"Green's dead!"

"As Marley's ghost. Which is where age and experience come in. To you Tiger Green's just a toerag, drank too much, nicked the odd car. But back in the Sixties he was a right tearaway, him and his brother, Sammy Carfax."

Mick Henneker was a second-generation copper. "I've heard of *him*. But what about the different names?"

"Both born wrong side of the blanket," Cordery told him. "Tiger went with his Mum as a baby, Sammy was raised by *her* Mum. Bad blood between the womenfolk, very little contact that didn't lead to court on charges of conduct likely to cause a breach of the peace. Tiger took his mother's name, Sammy was brought up as a Carfax."

"All the same it was Tiger who was supposed, *supposed* to have been here," Henneker said. "Sammy Carfax doesn't come into it. I never knew they were related—"

"If you'd seen them together you'd have known. They teamed up in approved school, Sammy and Tiger." Sergeant Cordery rose, his joints cracking. "They were never pulled for half the strokes they did, that pair. Two-man crime wave. Then Sammy took on another line—hit-man, kill for cash. I reckon he did a few of what the crime reporters call perfect murders, the chumps."

"He'd ambush his victims on the road—always a fast road where they'd be hitting at least sixty miles an hour. Sammy was a good shot. He'd blow a front tire out and more often than not the car would go out of control. Once it was a bookie. He veered out of his lane and went head-on into a lorry. Another chap sailed clean off a bridge. We never proved anything, mind. Well, I say *we* but two or three different Forces were involved—Sammy never did that kind of work in the Met Police area."

Mick Henneker felt obtuse. "It'll all come clear," Cordery assured him. "Once Sammy Carfax found an easier way to make money, he and Tiger

drifted apart. They still shared the same flat, and more besides, such as women, but they didn't work together any more.

"Tiger was a boot and broken-bottle, pick-handle, cosh kind of guy. Never shooters, and he didn't have the bottle for killing in cold blood, to order. Then he and Sammy fell out over one of their women; it's always the way, and there was a big bustup."

Cordery chortled grimly, rubbing his hands. "Tiger half killed his brother. Said he'd do the other half, no sweat, if Sammy ever showed his face around this patch again."

"I thought you said—" Henneker was still lost. "Sammy was the killer, yes? Tiger wouldn't go that far."

"Oh, Sammy was yellow. Holding a rifle fifty yards from danger, that was fine, but he couldn't punch his way out of a paper bag. When Tiger went berserk he cut and ran. Went to France the very same day and never came back. Now then, it gets fascinating. The story is that Sammy Carfax had money stashed away somewhere safe. Tiger knew about it, but he didn't know where. So when he banished Sammy he was hitting him in the pocket as well as his pride."

"You mean Sammy was on the Continent and the money was here?"

"Bravo." Sergeant Cordery, head down and spine bent, started quartering the chapel floor. "Not *here* here if you get my drift, but somewhere in our manor. Tiger and Sammy lived only a street or two away. I never thought Tiger had the brain to find his brother's private piggy bank—" He paused, dropped to one knee, and laughed. "Give us your penknife, son."

A parquet tile came up, quite easily, and another. Again, the wood showed fresh scratches. Concrete beneath the tiling had been chipped away—long before, since the sides and bottom were furry with dust, leaving a deep cavity beneath. "A floor safe," Cordery muttered.

D-C Henneker retrieved his knife. "I still don't get it. Tiger's dead and Sammy Carfax ran away. So who found this hidey-hole and cleaned it out?"

Cordery shook his head. "They weren't just brothers, those two. They were twins. When Algy Weak told us he saw Tiger he thought he was telling the truth. But it was Sammy he spotted—Sammy, collecting his nest egg."

"As usual, we're late," Superintendent Dunstable fumed. "Obviously

Carfax was desperate for that money. He's not getting any younger, he probably needed it. So he came back, killed Green, and picked up his hoard, knowing he wouldn't have Tiger on his back.

"He'll be long gone, you can bet your boots. Back across the Channel. Not our pigeon, the Yard can take it from here."

"You know those Forensic blokes," said Superintendent Ronaldson. "They reckon Green's offside front tire *might* have been shot at, but they won't commit themselves. But I can't blame 'em, really—they've only got some half melted rubber and a maybe-suspicious scratch on the wheel-rim to go by."

Three days having passed, Superintendent Dunstable was checking progress with his opposite number at Perilea.

"I still think Green was knocked on the head or the man we're after got him drunk and stuck him in the car," Ronaldson nagged. "That brick I mentioned, it was badly scorched like all the other rubble where the wreck landed but it's definitely newer than any of the other bits and pieces there."

"That flyover's very little used late at night. Put your victim in the front passenger seat, right? Start the car, keeping your door open, get it into, say, second gear. Jam the brick on the throttle pedal, dive out—and over she goes, there's your tragic accident. Of course, you've carefully stuck a can of petrol in too, probably with a fuse, in case the impact doesn't ignite it."

Dunstable tut-tutted. "You do love that brick of yours, Ron. I told you, Sammy Carfax is a sniper; he's no good at the physical stuff. Anyway, it's all what you might call academic. Sammy's gone to ground overseas and that's the last we'll hear of it."

Hanging up, he wagged his head. Poor old Ron ought to know by now that villains, thank the Lord, never altered their ways of doing things. Too much of a good thing, or rather a bad one, was an alien concept to the vast majority of them. That was why they tended to come unstuck in the long run.

A thought struck him. He pressed the buzzer for Sergeant Cordery, and shared it.

"I'll get Henneker and a couple more lads!" Cordery said. "Bloody hell, sir! We never thought of looking for him here!"

But Henneker wasn't around. D-C Marshall, coming into the CID

room as Cordery shouted for him said, "Henneker? I saw him outside the Rose and Crown a minute ago, on my way here. Wet Weak was bending his ear as per usual. Giving him a hot tip on the Great Train Robbers, I bet."

"We'll pick him up on the way," Cordery said. "Bring Bill too, Marshall. I'll get the car."

"No good looking down your nose, Mr. Henneker," Algy Weak insisted, though his tone was defensive. "I *saw* him just now—in that warehouse by the canal. He was peeping out the top window where the tallyman used to check the barges unloading."

About to explode, Mick Henneker shut his mouth. Superintendent Dunstable had told them to keep quiet about the late Tiger Green and his lethal brother. Sammy Carfax had run for it, more out of habit than panic, Dunstable had lectured. And as long as he was unaware that the police were onto him he just might return to England one day.

D-C Henneker gave Wet Weak a couple of pound notes. Prompt as a ferret down a rabbit hole, Weak vanished into the pub outside which they'd met. Come to think of it, Henneker reminded himself, the derelict warehouse might be worth a look-see. Algy Weak had spotted neither Tiger Green, who was dead, nor Sammy Carfax, who was out of the country, but he must have seen somebody, and an arrest—even of teenage vandals or their older brothers looting lead piping for its scrap value—was an arrest.

An alley beside the Rose and Crown ended in steps to the canal towpath. Mick Henneker looked at his watch, found that he had time for the half mile round trip, and set off for the warehouse.

Once inside the place, it didn't seem such a good idea. It was spooky, dank, and echoing. Nobody would hide here—it was inhospitable and depressing just to set foot inside.

Henneker jeered at himself and clanked up the iron stairway to where a wooden hutch clung swallow's-nest style to the end wall of the warehouse. The door wasn't locked and he went straight in.

For a moment sudden sunlight dazzled him. Spots swimming in his vision, he looked out of the hutch's grimy window. Well, there was the towpath on the far bank of the canal. Algy Weak *could* have glanced up from there and seen—

Mick Henneker saw something too. At the corner of an eye.

And he never forgot the sight meeting him as he whirled round.

Tiger Green. No doubt of it. D-C Henneker had helped to arrest Tiger on a drunk-and-disorderly charge only a fortnight or so before Tiger's death at Perilea. Tiger might be a twin, but he was a distinguishable twin. He'd fallen against a pub table during the fracas and the angry red mark of the healed gash was plain on his forehead.

Mick Henneker wasn't superstitious, but the sight of a dead man made him gasp. The next moment he felt a smashing blow on the chest, was hit in the small of the back and across the shoulders, heard glass and wood breaking, and the next thing he knew he was in thin air, falling, the sky and a corner of warehouse roof skidding crazily at the end of his nose.

Having located Algy in the Rose and Crown, Sergeant Cordery and the D-Cs Marshall and Ranger were only minutes behind the young detective-constable. And saw him sail out of the warehouse window, kicking and flailing. The sound of breaking glass had jerked their heads in the right direction as if on a shared cord.

There was a tremendous splash. Marshall, who had lifesaving certificates, swore as he kicked off his shoes. "Here goes my new suit, Sarge!" He dived in before finishing the sentence.

Cordery bellowed at D-C Ranger, "Round the back, and be careful!" They sprinted for the warehouse. A man catapulted out of the front door just as Cordery was plunging through. Cordery hit him three times with energy and skill.

"Call an ambulance," he yelled to Ranger. "Not for this one, for Mick!"

D-C Henneker, sitting up in the hospital bed, was speaking his well worn phrase. "I don't get it, Sarge. First Tiger Green's dead, then he isn't Tiger, he's Sammy Carfax. Then he's Tiger again and it's Carfax who's dead. What the hell goes on?"

Cordery gestured airily. "It's dead simple, son. We just had it wrong way round."

We did, didn't you? was Henneker's disloyal thought.

"See," Cordery said, "when Wet Weak reckoned he'd seen Tiger it seemed only sense for it to be a mistake. Tiger was killed in that car crash, so he must have seen Sammy."

"But then the Skipper got to thinking. Sammy hadn't the guts for hand-to-hand killing, he always used a shooter. And the CID at Perilea were sure the car crash hadn't involved a firearm.

"But Tiger had plenty of bottle and loved to use his fists. Supposing he decided to rig a fatal road accident, picking up the idea from Sammy? Meaning we ought to be shaking out all Tiger's safe houses round the manor instead of assuming chummy was up and away on his toes to France."

Mike Henneker thought he might have a touch of concussion despite the doctors' assurances. His brain was sure of it, churning and aching dully.

Sergeant Cordery winked at him.

"Great man, Mr. Dunstable. A sure sign of genius, being able to contemplate the downright impossible, wouldn't you say? See, he put it to himself that Wet Weak *had* to get something right once in his miserable little life.

"Once you cottoned on to that—that he *had* seen Tiger sneaking out of the chapel the other day—it was all pie-easy. And now Tiger's singing like a bird, if you don't mind a mixed metaphor."

"Not the long words, please, Sarge," Henneker pleaded. "I don't feel very well."

Cordery waved the claim away.

"Born to be hung, you. Lot of fuss about a mere forty-foot drop into water. No backbone, you kids."

"Oh, I've got a backbone. It hurts all the way down."

"Eat up your grapes and stop whining, there's a good boy," Cordery advised. "Seems that Sammy Carfax did get sick of living abroad. And he wanted his money. It was only five thousand quid but he was dead broke.

"So he got word to Tiger, how about letting bygones be bygones? Tiger isn't any good at that, but deep in that primitive mind he worked things out. He'd been trying to find Sammy's cash for years.

"So he sent word back, he'd bury the hatchet if Sammy gave him a cut of the money. Like I've been saying, Sammy was yellow—he jumped at the offer. Probably thought part of something was better than a hundred percent of nowt. He never dreamed his own brother would knock him off.

"He got himself smuggled in aboard a sealed container truck from Brussels—there's a freight depot at Perilea—and phoned Tiger to pick

him up there. Tiger got him drunk, Sammy let slip that the Baptist chapel was where his X marked the spot, and that was the end of him. All very simple once you get the hang of it."

D-C Henneker could hardly believe his ears. Sergeant Cordery sounded smug. And this was the man who'd been categorical about Tiger Green being dead as a doornail and that the man they really had to look out for was Sammy Carfax. Cordery *looked* smug, come to that.

Mick Henneker closed his eyes. Grownups mustn't cry. "Very simple," he agreed hollowly.



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Hank had a whole new understanding of cops—and other things . . .

OUT OF CIRCULATION

by
CARL
JOHNSON



Thanks to Jake, my ever-loving brother-in-law, I'm sitting in the county slammer charged with knocking over the Cannon City First Interstate Bank. Got sixty-five thousand, according to the newspaper accounts and the assistant prosecutor who is trying to send me up to the state pen.

But, believe me, I didn't do it. Plumbing is my thing. I'm a good one, with a reputation that I can walk off one job and pick up another one without losing a day's work.

Unfortunately, I took the afternoon off the day the bank was robbed. Something personal I had to take care of—or should I say, I couldn't pass up. Just my luck, the same afternoon Jake knocked over the bank.

Oh, yes, it had to be Jake. He's the one who gave me the crisp new twenties the prosecutor used to indict me. And the morning after the bank robbery Jake was out of bed—the first time since he moved in with Esther and me that he was out of the warm sack before noon. "Gotta catch the eight o'clock flight to L.A.," he says.

It was news to me that he was finally gonna leave. All he had was a roll of twenties and he says he don't want to hand the cabbie a twenty for a five-dollar ride to the airport. Afraid, he says, the cabbie won't have any cash this time of morning.

Seventeen bucks is all I got. Jake says he'll take it and gives me the twenty. Esther won't give up any money because she needs change to get around. So at noon all I have when I go to pay for my lunch at Steve's Tavern is the bill.

Steve comments on how it's so new it crinkles. "Yeah," I laugh. "That's the way I get them from the bank."

That night I got another surprise. Esther left me a note that she's gone to visit her mother in Indiana. Musta made up her mind suddenlike, I thought. She never mentioned such plans to me.

I'm gonna have to go out to eat, so I go into the bedroom to take off my work clothes so I can shower and change. On the nightstand are ten more crisp twenties like the one Jake gave me in the morning, but no note—nothing. I figure Jake left that for three months' bed and board. It's little enough, but it kind of eases my resentment over the three months he's been in bed all morning after painting the town most of the night, not worrying a lick about a job while I had to roust out of the warm sack at five-thirty to spend the day manhandling pipes, tubs, and whatever to plumb those tract houses no matter how tired or bleary-eyed I felt.

With Jake's money I could go out on the town after supper. And with both him and Esther gone I knew it was going to be a great night. I put five of the twenties in my wallet in case something developed while I was bar-hopping.

Thinking back, I wouldn't rate that night a classic, but it was memorable, thanks to the redhead I met in the Starburst Lounge. Sometime around two in the morning I left her apartment for my own bed. With Esther gone to her mother's for who knew how long, it was comforting

to drive home without wracking my tired brain for an unbelievable explanation where I'd been.

Eleven o'clock the next morning I was flat on my back in the cramped crawl space under a new house at the tract, sweat-soldering a three-inch copper waste pipe into an elbow so close to a floor joist that the flame was scorching the joist.

"Hank!"

I turned down the torch and looked over to the opening to the crawl space. The foreman was crouched down and peering at me. "When you finish that joint, come out here."

I shut off the torch and crawled out a little later, complaining because I don't like the idea of crawling under houses any more than I have to.

Two guys in business suits were standing with the foreman.

"Detectives, Hank," the foreman said. "They want to talk to you."

"Where were you the day before yesterday?" one asked.

"Working," I said.

"All day?"

"Sure. I work five, sometimes six days a week."

The foreman shook his head. "You had some personal business. You took off at noon," he said.

"Oh, yeah." I shrugged. "But usually I'm working."

These two detectives, John and Nick I learned, invited me to come down to the station to talk about the afternoon I took off early—like I had a choice. Before I could agree or disagree I was in the back of their unmarked car, one sitting beside me, the other one turning the key in the ignition. All the way into town they were friendly and polite—real gentlemen. Changed my whole idea of the kind of people cops are. Even now whenever they're in the county jail they walk down the cell block and look in and ask how I'm doing.

When the car started moving, the detective who was driving sang out, "Give him his Miranda, John."

The rest of the way into the station they made small talk like we'd known each other for years. At the station they took me into John's office. We sat down and the three of us drank coffee and talked. My coffee was maybe halfway down my styrofoam cup when John leaned back in his chair and looked at me, serious as a judge.

"You wanta tell us what you did the other afternoon when you took off work? Who you saw, where you went, everything?"

"You're in serious trouble, Hank," Nick said. "Better tell everything."

"Look, guys," I said. "I got no idea what you mean. I spent the afternoon with a friend. I didn't do anything you'd be interested in."

"Where?" John persisted.

I shrugged my shoulders.

"The Shady Lawn Motel," I said, irritated. "All afternoon. The lady was perfectly all right when we split."

John nodded his head, not taking his eyes off me, like he was looking into my head to see what I was thinking. I was about to open my mouth when he pulled open the middle drawer on his desk and took out a new twenty-dollar bill and put it on the blotter where I could see it. "Remember this bill?"

"You're kidding," I said. "How'd anyone know one bill from another?"

"This one's special," Nick said.

"It's brand new. It has a special serial number." John paused and leered at me. "It crinkles."

"In fact," Nick interrupted, "you were saying only yesterday it's the way you get them from the bank."

"Steve. Steve's Tavern?"

Nick bobbed his head. "It was identified yesterday afternoon when Steve turned in the receipts before the bank closed. When we talked to him he recalled your comment."

"Tell us how you got the bill," John said softly.

"Jake!" I said after fuming a bit. "Jake! He and Janet had to catch the plane yesterday morning. All he had was the twenties in the roll he pulled out of his pocket. All new. Crisp like that one. He said he didn't want to give one to a cabbie for a five-dollar ride to the airport."

John and Nick let me talk on about how Jake got all my change, then they made me repeat everything, stopping me constantly to ask questions. I told them about the ten bills Jake had left on my nightstand.

"Did you pass any of those?"

"Pass? No, but I spent a couple at the Starburst Lounge last night."

For the first time they told me about the robbery at the First Interstate Bank and that the crisp new bills I had were part of the money taken.

I pulled out my wallet and showed them the crisp new bills I had with me. "You mean these are hot too?"

After checking the serial numbers against a list he pulled from his drawer, John nodded his head.

A few hours later they had the five bills I left at home plus the two I'd spent at the Starburst Lounge. I was fingerprinted and booked in the jail and advised to get a lawyer. "The best one you can get," Nick added.

Of course, I didn't see the need for a lawyer. Maybe I shouldn't have taken the afternoon off, especially that afternoon, but after all I was just fulfilling the dream of any healthy young guy. Besides, John and Nick could verify I'd been at the Shady Lawn Motel. Of course, they wouldn't find Hank Briswall on the register, but I gave them the name I'd given and the room number I was assigned.

They found the name I used on the registration card assigned to the room I said, but the clerk claimed he didn't recognize my picture. He claimed he was careful never to look at the guys who signed in with dames in the afternoon. He said he'd learned it only got him involved in adultery and paternity suits.

"Considering the circumstances, maybe your friend will come forward and verify that you spent the afternoon in the motel with her," John suggested.

"I ain't the kind of guy who spends the afternoon with a lady, then blabs."

John and Nick nodded their heads. They're cool guys—understanding. Like I said, I got a whole new understanding of cops after dealing with those two.

John pushed the phone on his desk toward me. "Call her and explain your problem. Maybe she'll come down and corroborate your story."

It was sinking in that I was between a rock and a hard place. What could I do? "She went with Jake," I said.

"That would be Janet—Jake's wife?"

"That's how Jake introduces her, but me and Esther never heard of a marriage."

"Maybe your wife can help us locate the woman—and Jake too."

"Yeah," I said, full of hope, giving them Esther's mother's name and address. "An' if you move fast maybe you can pick him up with the money. But you got to move fast. The three months he was with us was the longest I've known him to stay in one place."

I was optimistic when I sat down the next afternoon to talk to John and Nick, but they quickly told me that Esther didn't know anything.

"Hank?" Steve leaned toward me. "Are you sure Jake went to L.A.?"

I shrugged. "He said he was going there."

"You also said you didn't know your wife was planning to visit her mother."

"Yeah. So?"

"We couldn't find a record of Jake and Janet boarding a plane to L.A.—under his own name anyway—or of buying a ticket. However, your wife bought a ticket to Indianapolis a week ago."

"You're putting me on," I said.

"No, we think you're putting us on, Hank. The four of you planned the heist. You go to work as usual. The others leave town. Your wife has the money. Maybe Jake. Maybe they split it."

"Maybe you stashed the loot around Cannon City," Nick suggested.

"Would I be so dumb to rob a bank and spend that money the day after?"

"You did," John said matter-of-factly.

"That proves I didn't know anything about the robbery," I protested.

"No, it proves you spent the money looted from the bank."

"When are you going to pick up Jake?" I asked hopefully.

"Your wife merely confirmed that Jake said he was headed for L.A."

"That's all?"

"Not exactly, Hank. We found her uncommunicative over the phone and requested a couple of the locals to visit her for us. She seems to think you took more than a few afternoons off to spend in a motel."

"As well as a lot of nights," Nick added.

"At least once a week since you married," John continued. "She is one miffed woman and I don't think she cares if you ever beat this rap."

"In fact she expressed the opinion you needed a few years in the pokey to cool you off."

"How long have you and Esther been married?" John asked.

"Five years, going on six," I said.

They both leaned back and stared at me.

"Hooey!" Nick exploded. "Every week? For six years?"

"You must get more by accident than we get by design," John said.

"Wait a minute," I objected. "I never fooled around the first year. Well, at least the first eight or nine months."

"Getting back to business," John said abruptly, "do you have any pictures of Jake taken in the past couple of months? The only pictures in Indiana were taken about ten years ago."

I shook my head. "Jake didn't like to have his picture taken. Bad karma, he said."

If it wasn't for the court-appointed lawyer who comes in for a visit—maybe I should say an argument—I'd lose all track of time. It's becoming pretty clear, at least to me, I'll be eligible for social-security before I get out, possibly before I come to trial.

"You can't have a trial," the lawyer says, "until you and I agree on the plea."

"No problem," I keep telling the jerk. "I'm not guilty."

"Now, now, na-aow, Mr. Briswall," he sighs, "there is no evidence—not a shred—to the contrary. Not one mitigating circumstance upon which I could possibly build such a plea."

"How can you convict a guy's not guilty?" I protest. "How?" It's obvious to me this guy doesn't know what he's talking about, but I don't have enough money to hire a good lawyer. "It's plain and simple. I'm not guilty."

"Mr. Briswall, he says, "it's true that the lone robber who held up the Cannon City First Interstate Bank wore a tight-fitting silk stocking that mashed his features so he couldn't be identified positively from his face, but you must acknowledge that the robber was your height and your build, and the clothes he wore were discovered in your clothes closet. And the gun—positively identified from the ballistics—was found in your closet. You passed some of the money from the holdup. You also carried some on your person. All with serial numbers matching those taken."

He paused, then shook his head slowly and screwed up his face like bile had backed up from his stomach. "I've seen the photographs taken by the bank cameras. If only you hadn't fired that damn gun in the bank I might possibly challenge just that one piece of evidence. Maybe I could have built that one challenge into a basis for a plea bargain."

Of course, I got mad as usual and started to shout. "You're like the rest of these guys! Guilty until proven innocent! Where's the rest of the sixty-five thousand I'm supposed to have? Tell me! Jake's got it—you know that!"

"So you have averred, Mr. Briswall. But until your brother-in-law is

found—with the money, mind you—all the available evidence points solely to you. Besides,” he added, “your brother-in-law probably would be charged as an accomplice even if he has the money. Unless, of course, he were to confess and absolve you of complicity.”

Oh, what I’d give to have Jake and a stillson wrench in this cell with me.

The blockbuster was the visit of her lawyer to inform me that Esther had returned to our apartment in Cannon City and was suing me for divorce on the grounds of incompatibility and the breakdown of our marriage. I objected that that was a crock. I always fulfilled my obligations as a husband and Esther never complained, any time, let alone mentioned incompatibility. I certainly brought home enough to maintain her better than most wives.

The lawyer waved his hand and said, “Mr. Briswall, I’m here merely to serve notice of the action initiated by your wife. Your opportunity to challenge that action will come in a court of law.”

“Maybe,” I said, unconvinced. I noticed he was studying me the way a plumbing inspector goes over a new installation. I had the feeling he was there for more than to give me some papers. “What are you looking at?” I asked him.

“Oh. Ah. Excuse me, Mr. Briswall.” He recoiled like I’d jabbed him. Then damned if he didn’t grin, and I thought seriously of planting my knuckles between his eyes. “No offense, Mr. Briswall,” he said, not wiping the grin off his face. “I—uh, to be honest, I came here to inform you of your wife’s action and serve the papers on you personally instead of sending them with a process server because, uh, I just had to see you for myself.”

“Why? To size me up?”

He stared at me. “Well, yes, if you put it that way.” Damned if his grin didn’t widen. “To be honest, Mr. Briswall, the legal action initiated by your wife is going to engross your name among the most illustrious womanizers of history. Never in my three decades plus practice in domestic law have I encountered a defendant charged with as many instances of infidelity over the comparatively short period of your marriage.”

He rambled on about Don Juan, Cellini, Lothario, Byron, and what he called some other libertines, names I never heard of. But *their* reputations, he assured me, were supported mainly by their own brag. “Your

record though," he said, "is going to be documented, sworn to, set down in a court of law, and become part of the legal literature."

I was speechless. What could I say? I didn't know if I should be honored or insulted. Like I told the detectives, a guy with any class doesn't kiss and tell. It seemed absolutely gross to be talking like this clown. Finally I told him so.

He looked at me in surprise. "You're going to deny it? That will do you no good. I'll prove every affair."

"You can't," I protested.

"On the contrary. Your wife had the wisdom to get one of the most competent private investigators to observe and record your—activities."

Good old Esther, I thought.

"A Pee Eye got pictures?" I asked hopefully.

"Many."

"The Shady Lawn Motel on February sixth. Can he prove I was there then?"

"Mr. Briswall, I'll be pleased to discuss any aspects of the divorce action with your lawyer." The clown pushed a business card into my hand, got to his feet, and walked out of the room without answering my question.

As quickly as I could, I told the clown the court appointed to defend me about the visit of Esther's lawyer. And to make sure there was no slip-up I got word to John and Nick about Esther's lawyer having pictures of me at the Shady Lawn Motel. They promised they'd look at the pictures and talk to the investigator.

That night, for the first time since the law locked me up, I felt like maybe soon I'd get out of this crummy slammer. I felt so good I almost enjoyed the slum they dished onto my plate for supper. The rest of the evening I sat waiting, hoping one of the detectives or even the lawyer would drop in and give me the good news. It would be nice to get out before bedtime. But no one came.

John and Nick appeared thoughtful when they appeared right after lunch.

"You got the pictures," I said hopefully.

Their heads shook slowly, like they were synchronized. "They have pictures, but nothing covering the afternoon of February sixth," John said.

"Why not?"

"Your wife fired the investigator the week before, the same day she bought her ticket to Indianapolis."

"Probably she, Jake, and his wife were on the way to buy their plane tickets," Nick broke in. "They were with her when she dropped into the investigator's office, fired him, and paid him off."

The two of them were looking at me sadly.

"Do those circumstances tell you anything, Hank?" John asked.

"Jake and Esther seldom wrote to each other as long as I can remember," I said. "In fact, I think she thought he was involved in something crooked, but she wouldn't talk about it. Yeah, I'm surprised they hit it off so good."

"But, Hank, has it occurred to you that maybe the two of them thought of a way they could help each other?" John studied me. "Sure, your wife could get a divorce based on the investigator's evidence, but putting you in jail would cinch it *and* get back at you for the years you've been chipping around on her. She doesn't hide her irritation with you or her pleasure at the thought of you being out of circulation."

I felt like I was getting a chill.

"You mean Esther and Jake planned for me to be in the Shady Lawn Motel that afternoon?"

"I think they offered up Janet and left the motel selection to you." Nick grinned.

"How could Esther do this to me?" I groaned.

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*Captain Leopold had spent his career belittling happenstance
and coincidence . . .*

THE KILLER AND THE CLOWN

by EDWARD
D. HOCH



Raymond Oates was sleeping when the call came. It was his wife Anna who awakened him, tugging gently on his pajama sleeve as if fearful of rousing him too suddenly. "What is it, Anna?" he mumbled, trying to turn over in the bed.

"There's a detective on the phone—a Captain Leopold from up in Connecticut. It's about Sandy."

He sat up, fully awake now. The bedside clock showed a few minutes

before six. No light had appeared yet around the edges of the window shade. "What *about* Sandy? Isn't she at college?"

"He didn't say. He wants to speak to her father."

Oates slid out of bed and walked in his bare feet to the extension phone in the upper hall. He was surprised he hadn't heard it ring, but then Anna was a light sleeper. "Raymond Oates here," he said into the mouth-piece.

"Mr. Oates, this is Captain Leopold. I'm in charge of violent crimes here in Monroe. I'm sorry to bother you so early in the morning, but we have a young woman here named Sandy Oates. She says she's your daughter."

"Of course she's my daughter. She's in college there. What's this all about?"

"There's been some trouble, Mr. Oates. You may want to drive up here with a lawyer."

"Is this some business with drugs?"

"This is more serious than drugs, Mr. Oates. We found her in the apartment of a man named Gilbert Fez. Do you know him?"

Oates's heart skipped a beat. "I know the name. We've never met, but he got Sandy into trouble once before."

"I have to tell you, your daughter's under suspicion in his murder."

The words froze Oates's blood. He put a hand to his head to steady himself. "No—Sandy would never harm anyone!"

"You'd better get up here, Mr. Oates," the voice repeated, giving him directions for finding police headquarters.

Oates hung up the telephone and leaned against the wall. "What is it, Ray?" Anna asked, alarmed.

"They say she killed that creep Fez she was involved with before! Anna—what will I do?"

"Go up there, of course. Go to her."

He started to dress. "Do you want to come with me?"

"It's your place, Ray, not mine. I'm only her stepmother."

"All right," he said. "I'll call you as soon as I know anything."

It was an hour's drive through Westchester and along the Connecticut Turnpike to the city where Sandy's college was. Raymond Oates had made the journey many times in the past three years, generally alone and often on some mission of rescue—trying to protect his daughter from friends like Fez, from a drug arrest that threatened her college career for a time,

from boys like Jeff who treated her badly. But never before had there been anything as serious as a possible murder charge.

How had she met such people in the first place? What had he done wrong? After the divorce and Mona's remarriage he'd tried to be both father and mother to the girl. She was his only child, after all, and was entitled to a bit of spoiling. As she'd grown up he'd been able to see in her more and more of the things he'd loved in Mona when they were first married. But like her mother, Sandy was a bad judge of people, running with a crowd that soon involved her in drugs and worse. Her grades had suffered until he took a hand, got the drug charges dropped, and arranged for her to move back on campus. He'd thought that was the end of it, but recently there'd been evidence she was seeing Fez again.

Gilbert Fez was a college dropout who'd taken to hanging around the campus and striking up friendships with the younger students, especially the women. His handsome dark features, inherited from a Turkish father, were obviously attractive to women, and he had a way of talking that never failed to charm them. Oates had glimpsed him once while in Sandy's company about a month earlier. At first he feared they were living together but then he realized Fez was merely her source for pot and the pills she was using again.

"Everyone at school does it!" she responded when he confronted her. "I'm not hurting anyone!"

"You're hurting yourself," he insisted, but she wouldn't listen. After that he tried talking to Jeff Trudgen, the young graduate student she was dating, and, no doubt, sleeping with. But Jeff seemed unable or unwilling to control her.

And so it had come to this.

The morning rush-hour traffic was just beginning when Raymond Oates parked his car in the lot next to police headquarters and went inside to find his daughter and Captain Leopold.

It had been a long night for Leopold. Because of a rash of armed robberies on the city's north side he'd been working the four-to-twelve shift that week, leaving the daytime paperwork to Lieutenant Fletcher. It felt good to be back on the street with his squad. He'd been arranging stakeouts at some likely grocery and liquor stores and keeping in radio contact with a dozen patrol cars cruising the area.

Sergeant Connie Trent was with him this week in the unmarked car,

because she'd worked as an undercover narcotics detective in the area of the robberies before joining Leopold's squad. "The place has changed a lot in eight years," she said with a touch of sadness.

"You mean it's worse than when you were working the narc squad?"

"It's shabbier, more run-down. The stores used to have big, well lighted display windows. Now they're mostly bricked up, with only a tiny window about six feet off the ground."

"It's the times we live in," Leopold admitted. "Sometimes this city can be a jungle, Connie. But I wouldn't live anywhere else."

She glanced at the dashboard clock. "Almost midnight and nothing's happened. Our clown bandit must be taking the night off."

"We'll see."

He'd been dubbed the "clown bandit" because he wore clown makeup on his face to disguise his identity. During the past two weeks he'd hit a dozen stores on the city's north side, always entering in the late evening when the clerks were preparing to close. He carried a 9 mm. Luger pistol which he'd fired on two occasions, once into the ceiling and another time into the leg of a clerk who'd started running for the door. Leopold had no doubt it was only a matter of time before he killed someone.

They passed a neighborhood bar with a line of motorcycles parked outside. "That used to be a nice Italian restaurant," Connie commented. "The best veal scallopini in town."

He started to reply but the radio crackled an interruption. "Clown bandit at Glassman's Discount Liquor, Code 44."

"That's it!" Leopold swung the car into a sharp U-turn and turned on the siren.

Glassman's was one of the places they'd staked out, and as Leopold and Connie pulled up in front of it two minutes later they found one of the detectives, Beckett, on the street. "I missed him, Captain! There was an old lady in the store and she got in the way! He ran down this alley!"

Leopold caught a glimpse of someone at the far end of the narrow passageway, under a streetlight. He pulled his revolver from his belt holster and started in pursuit. "Police!" he shouted. "Stop or I'll shoot!"

But the figure was already around the corner, out of sight. By the time Leopold reached the end of the alley, the street was empty in both directions. Connie had taken the wheel of their car, and she pulled around the corner with a screeching of tires.

"No sign of him that way," she told Leopold. After a moment Beckett rounded the corner from the opposite direction with a similar report.

"He's slipped through our fingers again," Leopold grumbled.

Connie got out of the car and studied the shabby walk-up apartment buildings on either side of the street. "Have you ever thought about why he's such a phantom, Captain? This guy is no ordinary stick-up man who puts a handkerchief or a ski mask over his face before he walks into a store. He wears fairly elaborate grease-paint makeup that takes time to apply. Sure, he can wipe most of it off as he makes his getaway, but what about before the robbery? With half the police in the city looking for the clown bandit, do you think he calmly walks or drives around town in that makeup?"

"That's been bothering me too," Leopold admitted. "But what's the answer? Maybe it isn't makeup at all. Maybe it's a thin rubber mask of some sort."

Detective Beckett shook his head. "I was close enough to get a good look at him tonight, Captain. It's his real face with all this clown goo on it. It's no mask."

"What about his hair?"

"A fright wig like clowns wear sometimes. But the rest of his clothes were normal—jeans and a short leather jacket."

"See what I mean, Captain?" Connie asked. "Where does he come from in a get-up like that? As I see it there are only two possibilities. Either he hides on the floor of a car with an accomplice driving—"

"I don't like that possibility," Leopold said. "No one's ever seen him getting away in a car, and no accomplice has ever appeared with him in any of the stores."

"If it was a girl, she'd probably stay in the car," Beckett said. "Connie could be right."

"What's the other possibility?" Leopold asked Connie.

"He could live right around here. All the robberies have been within a few blocks of this street. He could apply the makeup in his apartment, come out when the street is deserted, and run down these alleys to the stores he wants to rob."

Leopold gazed up at the blank windows of the buildings. Now, just after midnight, most of them were dark. "That's an idea," he agreed. "Let's check out a couple of these buildings."

Beckett took the first one on the right while Leopold and Connie went

on to the second doorway. It was a seedy three-story building with a single naked lightbulb burning in the front hallway. Leopold kept his hand close to his gun as he led the way inside. "You'd think the landlord would at least put a lock on the outside door. No wonder there are so many—"

"Look!"

Connie was pointing down the hall to the rear of the first floor where a young girl leaned unsteadily against a door jamb. Her face was flushed and her eyes glazed. She held a long-bladed hunting knife loosely in her left hand. Leopold's gun was out at once, but Connie stayed his hand. "She's high on something."

The girl was an attractive blonde of around twenty, with straight hair to her shoulders; she was wearing jeans and a bright-red top. She kept shaking her head and mumbling someone's name.

"What's she saying?" Leopold asked.

"Sounds like Gilbert, but I can't be sure." Connie stepped forward. "Come on, Miss, give me the knife. We're police officers."

The girl offered no resistance as Connie took the knife from her hand.

"Gilbert," the girl mumbled. "Gilbert—"

"This looks like blood on the blade," Connie said.

"Hang onto her while I look inside."

Leopold pushed the door further open and stepped into the pink glow of a dimly lit apartment. The first thing he saw was an overturned chair. The next thing was the body of a man sprawled on his back. There were two wounds in his chest, near the heart, and Leopold guessed that either one of them could have killed him.

Some hours later, back at headquarters, the girl had recovered enough to give her name as Sandy Oates. She was a junior at the local college and her father was an insurance executive living in Westchester County. Her parents had divorced and remarried and she'd chosen to stay with her father.

"What about Gilbert Fez?" Leopold asked. "Do you want to tell us about him?"

She ran her slender hands over a tear-streaked face. "I don't know how he died. I don't know anything about it."

Leopold sighed. "Look, we're going to call your father pretty soon and

he'll get you a lawyer. These are just preliminary questions. You've been taking drugs tonight, haven't you?"

"I got things from Gilbert sometimes. He sold LSD to the kids on campus."

"And he gave you something tonight?"

"Yes, I guess so. I don't remember too much. I must have passed out in his room. When I came to, he was dead on the floor. I don't remember it very well. I picked up the knife, and then I went to the door and someone was in the hallway."

"That was me, Miss Oates. Was anyone else in the apartment tonight? Was he expecting anyone else?"

"No, he never had anyone else there when he was dealing."

"Did you often take drugs at his apartment?"

"Once or twice."

"Is he your boy friend?"

"No. I have a boy friend—My God! Jeff! I have to let Jeff know about this!"

"Calm down, Miss Oates. It's the middle of the night. Why don't you rest a bit more and then we'll get a stenographer in here for a formal statement. You can have a lawyer present if you wish."

Leopold left her alone, resting on a cot in one of the rooms used for interrogation. Connie was waiting in his office with the preliminary opinion of the medical examiner. "He says Gilbert Fez died sometime before midnight, probably within an hour of when we found the body. There were two knife thrusts to the heart and the angle seems consistent with a left-handed killer. Is Sandy Oates left-handed?"

He nodded. "When we first saw her she was holding the knife in her left hand. A little while ago I had her write down her father's name and phone number. She did that with her left hand too."

"Any evidence of someone else in the room?"

"Nothing I could find," Leopold said. "But I want to go back later today and look the place over again. First I think I should phone the father, Raymond Oates."

"What are you going to tell him?"

"That she's under suspicion in the murder of Gilbert Fez."

Raymond Oates was tall and slender and gave the appearance of less than great physical strength. At eight o'clock that morning he seemed

more than tired and very much alone. "This whole thing is too ridiculous for words, Captain. Sandy wouldn't hurt a fly."

"She was under the influence of drugs at the time, Mr. Oates. People have been known to behave in strange and violent ways in those circumstances."

"She would hardly have murdered Fez if he was supplying her with the drugs she was using."

"We're investigating all the circumstances, believe me. A close friend of your daughter, Jeff Trudgen, is due here shortly. We're also expecting her college roommate."

"Cynthia Donovan? She's a very nice girl. I expected her to be a good influence on Sandy this year."

Leopold's eyes sharpened. "There'd been trouble before?"

Sandy's father nodded. "I might as well tell you, there's a record of it at school anyway. She was arrested about a year ago in Providence on a marijuana charge. Fez was involved in that too. She'd been living off campus at the time and had fallen in with a bad crowd. It was her first offense and I managed to get the charges dropped on condition that she move back on campus and stop seeing Fez. Until recently I thought she had."

Lieutenant Fletcher appeared in the doorway, surprised to see Leopold at his desk. "Didn't you work last night, Captain?"

"All night, Fletcher. We stumbled onto a murder case."

"There's a young fellow named Jeff Trudgen waiting to see you."

"Send him in. And take Mr. Oates here down to see his daughter in the interrogation room, will you? Connie's with her."

Leopold went to the sink in the men's room and splashed cold water on his face. It helped to revive him a bit but he knew he'd have to get some sleep before long.

Back in his office a young man with curly hair and a moustache waited by the door.

"You must be Jeff Trudgen," Leopold said. "Come in."

The young man entered hesitantly, as if expecting the door to slam shut behind him. "They told me on the phone that Sandy's in some sort of trouble."

Leopold picked up a pad and pencil. "We don't know quite how much trouble yet. Did you know a man named Gilbert Fez?"

Trudgen nodded. "I knew him. I heard on the radio he's been murdered. But Sandy can't be mixed up in that!"

"Just tell me what you know about Fez."

"He used to be a student at school. He was part Turkish or something and all the girls went for him. He was dark and handsome, and he always had some pot to sell them. Sandy got in trouble last year over it, but I guess her dad got her off. She had to move back on campus though."

"Had she been seeing Fez again?"

"Not that I know of."

"She was found in his apartment with his body."

"You *can't* believe she killed him."

"It may have happened while she was under the influence of drugs. We don't think she was fully responsible."

"I don't believe it. There must be some mistake. Can I see her?"

"Her father's with her now. We'll want to get a statement from her before she sees anyone else."

"Well—" He hesitated. "Can I leave now?"

"No," Leopold said sharply. "You've been dating Sandy Oates. You must have known she was taking drugs again. Didn't you ever ask her about Fez?"

"Everybody smokes pot, Captain," the young man insisted. "I had no idea she was on anything else or that she was seeing Fez again."

"Maybe you found them together and stabbed him in a fit of jealousy."

"Me? Now you think *I* killed him?"

"Was she sleeping with him?"

"I don't know," Jeff answered moodily. "Sometimes I don't know what Sandy's all about. She's lied to me a few times about minor things. But I can't believe she killed him."

"Where were you last night between eleven and twelve?"

"I was studying at the college library till it closed at eleven. Then I walked back to the dorm."

"Did anybody see you?"

"No one I knew. I didn't imagine myself needing an alibi."

"All right," Leopold said, dismissing him. "Don't leave town for the next few days. We'll want to talk with you again soon."

After the young man left, Leopold went down the hall to the interrogation room where Raymond Oates was talking to his daughter.

Connie Trent was waiting outside. "I thought they should have a few

minutes alone," she told Leopold. "Oates was pretty broken up. He kept saying it was his fault she was in this mess."

"He got her off a drug charge a year ago. Maybe if he'd let her go to trial the experience would have impressed her more."

Connie shook her head sadly. "Who ever knows the right thing to do? We're all fallible, and sometimes parents are the most fallible of all."

Leopold knocked lightly and opened the door. Raymond Oates was seated with his arms around his daughter, cradling her as he must have when she was a child. "She's innocent," he told Leopold. "You must know that."

"We'll see," Leopold said. "Do you have a lawyer?"

"I can call one after nine." Oates glanced at the watch on his right wrist. "That's only ten minutes. But it'll take him another hour to get here."

"I'm going over to the murder scene again," Leopold said. "After you call your lawyer you can come with me if you'd like."

"What for?" Oates asked suspiciously.

"There are some women's belongings in the apartment. Perhaps you can identify them as Sandy's."

"All right," he agreed reluctantly. He went to call his lawyer and then they went down to the garage.

"Where's my car?" Leopold asked one of the mechanics who was washing a patrol vehicle.

"Detective Beckett took it, Captain. He thought you'd gone home for the day."

"What did Beckett want with it?" Leopold wondered.

"Checking out a lead on the clown bandit."

"All right," Leopold said with some exasperation.

"My car's right outside," Raymond Oates said. "We can go in that."

Leopold smiled. "It's an offer I can't refuse under the circumstances. But I've been walking home lately and the officer must have decided I didn't need the car."

They went outside to the public lot. "Excuse the scrape on your side," Oates said as he got in. "I ran into a parked motorcycle at a shopping center yesterday."

Leopold looked at the marks. "A red one, I'll bet."

"Never saw the damned thing. They're the curse of drivers."

"And policemen too," Leopold agreed. "In this climate we can't use

them ourselves in the winter. Beckett used to be a motorcycle cop before he became a detective. I should get him one again so he wouldn't need to borrow my car." He directed Oates through the side streets to the north end where Gilbert Fez had lived.

"A shoddy neighborhood," Oates observed. "Do you have much of an arson problem here, Captain?"

"Not yet."

"It's a big problem for insurance companies these days. People are burning down their cities and expecting to get paid for it."

Oates led the way to the ground-floor rear apartment and waited while Leopold unlocked the door. The place was much as it had been when Leopold first saw it at midnight, but now there was no body and the dim pink lights were turned out. He opened a drape and let the sunlight in.

"We found Fez there," Leopold explained, telling Oates how he and Connie had entered the building in search of the clown bandit. "He'd been stabbed twice in the chest with the knife your daughter was holding."

Oates looked away. "Where's the clothing you wanted me to check?"

It was a studio apartment with an elaborate Chinese screen unfolded to block the view of the bed in one corner. Leopold glanced at the rumpled spread. "They might have been lying here before the murder."

"Or Sandy might have passed out from the drugs while someone else entered the apartment and killed him. She might have slept here through the whole thing."

"It's possible," Leopold admitted, "though most of the pills we've found here seem to be uppers rather than downers. They wouldn't have put her to sleep."

"How do you know what she might have taken?" Raymond Oates stormed. "You're trying to convict her without a trial."

"Not at all, Mr. Oates. In fact, we're checking on her boy friend, Jeff Trudgen. He seems to have no alibi for the time of the killing and jealousy makes a very good motive." Leopold went to a rack on the wall near the bed and held out a purple dress and a nightgown. "Do either of these look familiar?"

"No. Sandy never wore purple."

"What about this?" Leopold held up a woman's wristwatch.

"Yes, that's hers," Oates admitted reluctantly.

Suddenly there was the sound of a key in the lock and Leopold hushed

him. They stepped back behind the Chinese screen and waited as the hall door slowly opened. A young woman stepped in, glanced around, and carefully closed the door behind her.

She was heading toward the screen when Leopold stepped around it and asked, "Can I help you, Miss?"

"My God—you scared me half to death!"

"Police—Captain Leopold. You're trespassing on a crime scene."

"I—I'm sorry." She was staring past Leopold's shoulder at Sandy's father. "Mr. Oates! What are you doing here?"

"Cynthia!"

"Could you identify yourself, Miss?" Leopold asked.

"I'm Cynthia Donovan," she said, pushing back her long brown hair to reveal an expressive, attractive face with dark eyes.

"Sandy Oates's roommate? I've been expecting you at headquarters."

"I was on my way there now."

"But you stopped here first," Leopold suggested. "Perhaps to retrieve your nightgown and dress?"

"Cynthia, were *you* involved with this Fez?" Oates asked.

"Let me do the questioning, please," Leopold said. "Is it true, Miss Donovan? Were you involved with Gilbert Fez?"

"No, I—"

"But you had a key to his apartment."

She let her gaze drop to the key still in her right hand. "All right, I admit it."

"Admit what? That you killed Gilbert Fez?"

"Certainly not! It's my dress and nightgown, that's all. I stayed here overnight once or twice."

"Did Sandy know that?" Oates demanded.

Leopold laid a hand on his arm. "Calm down, Mr. Oates."

"No, Sandy didn't know. I saw no reason to tell her."

"Was she having an affair with Fez too?"

"She was buying pills from him, that's all I know."

"So she might have become enraged if she recognized your dress and nightgown on the rack here? Enraged enough to stab Fez?"

"Sandy doesn't get enraged over anything, believe me. We lead our own separate social lives. I date and she dates, and neither one of us is the type to compare notes."

"I'll have to ask you for that key," Leopold said.

She handed it over. "Can I have my things?"

"For the moment, no. They're part of the evidence at a crime scene. But if you're not involved they'll be returned to you."

"Thanks. Can I go?"

"I'd still like you to come down to headquarters and answer a few more questions about Sandy. Could you make it tomorrow morning at nine?"

"Sure."

They left the apartment together and Leopold locked the door, covering the lock with a police-department sticker. Outside they watched Cynthia climb into her little white car, then they walked back to Oates's blue one. "Back to headquarters now?" Oates asked Leopold.

"Why not?" Leopold replied, feeling as if he hadn't slept in a week.

Oates's lawyer arrived at ten-thirty. After some consultation, Sandy Oates made a statement shortly before noon, admitting she'd gone to Fez's apartment to obtain drugs but denying she was implicated in his death in any way. She'd been having a bad LSD trip and Fez had given her some Valium to bring her down. It had knocked her out and she was sleeping off the effects when someone entered the apartment and murdered Fez. She'd awakened, dazed, picked up the knife, and stumbled to the door as Leopold and Connie arrived.

The story was the sort of thing that might have happened, but Leopold knew it was just as likely Sandy might have recognized her roommate's clothes on Fez's rack and killed him in a jealous rage. "Did you know Cynthia was seeing Fez?" he asked.

"They knew each other. I suppose she was buying grass from him."

"Nothing more?"

"No."

"Did you happen to see any of her clothes in Fez's apartment?"

"I don't think so. I don't remember."

"Isn't that enough questioning for now?" her father said. "Give the kid a break."

Leopold agreed. "We'll have to hold her a while longer, I'm afraid," he told Oates when they were alone.

"Are you charging her with the murder?"

"I haven't decided yet."

"You can't hold her much longer without charging her."

"I know that, Mr. Oates."

He went back to his office and found a report on the murder weapon waiting on his desk. It was a common brand of hunting knife sold at most sporting-goods stores. The only fingerprints on it had belonged to Sandy Oates.

Leopold decided he needed a few hours' sleep. He was on his way out when Connie Trent found him. "Do you have a minute, Captain?"

"You must be as tired as I am. Knock off for a few hours, Connie."

"I've been thinking about this case."

"The Fez killing?"

"Well, that too. But I was thinking of the clown bandit."

"What about him?"

"Beckett was out running down some leads earlier."

"I know. He took my car."

"He didn't find out anything, but something he said got me thinking. One night last week the clown bandit pulled two holdups within a half hour of each other. That means he left his makeup on all that time and traveled about a mile between the two stores. How did he do it without being seen?"

"We're back to your suggestion that he hides on the floor of a car driven by an accomplice. Or maybe in the back of a van."

But Connie shook her head. "The more I think of it, the more I feel he's a loner, Captain."

"Then how does he do it?"

"By covering his face."

"With a mask, I suppose," Leopold growled sarcastically. "That would be far less noticeable than clown makeup."

"I don't know," Connie admitted quietly. "I'm still working on that part."

"I'm sorry, Connie. Neither one of us has slept in two days. Let's knock off for a few hours and see how things look tonight."

"What time do you want me back in?"

He glanced at his watch, and something stirred in his subconscious. His brain was too fatigued just then to remember what it was. "I have to be back by five, I'm afraid, to do something about the Fez killing. But you don't need to come in that early."

"I'll be here."

"Connie?"

"Yes?"

"Did I say I was sorry?"

Leopold managed to sleep four hours, then roused himself and returned to headquarters. Fletcher informed him that Oates's lawyer was raising a storm, demanding Sandy Oates's immediate release. "We're going to have to charge her or release her, Captain. What'll it be?"

"Charge her, of course. Second-degree murder."

He checked in at his office and then went down to the police garage. Connie Trent was standing by the car waiting for him. "Were you able to sleep?" she asked.

"A little. How about you?"

"Three hours. Better than nothing, I suppose. What about Sandy Oates?"

"We're booking her. Murder two."

"If she was high on drugs—"

"That's for a jury to decide. What about the clown bandit? Do we have our stakeouts going tonight?"

"I'd like to try something different if it's all right with you. After last night he'll be expecting a stakeout, and I think he'll try hitting an entirely different type of place for just that reason."

"What's open at night besides grocery stores, liquor stores, and gas stations?"

"Lots of things—bowling alleys, fast-food places. We can never cover them all, so let's cover the area instead. We can put a dozen more cars on the street and catch him while he's getting away."

"In his clown makeup?"

"Yes."

"You know how?"

"I think so. We weren't asking ourselves the right question, Captain. It wasn't *how* but *why*? Why does he wear clown makeup in the first place, when a simple handkerchief over his face would do a far better job of disguising it?"

"I give up. Why?"

"To divert attention from the rest of his appearance."

"He wears jeans and a leather jacket. So what?"

"Exactly! Forget all about the clown makeup and the fright wig for a minute. Just concentrate on the jeans and leather jacket. What sort of vehicle does that suggest for a getaway?"

"Vehicle?" Leopold thought about it. "A motorcycle, maybe."

"You win the prize—a motorcycle is right!"

Leopold laughed out loud.

"You're trying to tell me the clown bandit pulls his stickups and then rides away on a motorcycle with that clown face still on?"

"That's just what I'm trying to tell you! And nobody sees it because his entire head is covered by a crash helmet—the kind with a tinted or mirrored visor covering the face."

Leopold stopped laughing.

They spent the evening hours cruising the neighborhood and waiting. Leopold was in touch with a dozen marked and unmarked cars, and they all knew what they were looking for. "He'll leave the motorcycle about a block away with the crash helmet chained to it," Connie speculated. "He'll run down an alley to his target store, as he did last night, and then go back the same way. Maybe he'll even coast on the cycle for a block or so before starting the motor so no one connects the sound of it with the robbery."

At ten-forty they picked up the radio call. The clown bandit had just held up a porno movie house on the north side. "Let's go," Leopold said. "That's only ten blocks from here!"

"We don't want to go right there," Connie cautioned. "Pull our cars in toward it and alert them for the motorcycle."

"There are lots of motorcycles in this area."

"But most of the riders will either have no visors or clear-plastic ones on their helmets."

They were just crossing Bailey Avenue, four blocks from the movie house, when Connie pointed down a side street. "There!"

The motorcycle with its helmeted rider was pulling into the intersection when Leopold cut across its path. The leather-jacketed man, his face invisible behind the tinted visor, swerved to avoid their car. He went down in the street and Leopold and Connie were out after him. "Police!" Leopold shouted.

The man's hand dove under his leather jacket and came out with the Luger pistol. Leopold was tugging at his own gun when Connie flung herself at the outstretched arm and knocked the cyclist off balance. He tripped over his fallen motorcycle and went down, the Luger flying from

his grip. Leopold had his weapon out then. "Freeze!" he ordered. "You're under arrest!"

Connie tugged the crash helmet from his head and for an instant Leopold thought of Detective Beckett. Beckett, who'd once been a motorcycle cop, who might somehow have faked the previous night's holdup and had them chasing a phantom. He stared hard at the grease-paint makeup as the clown's face came into view. No, don't let it be Beckett—

Connie wiped away some of the makeup. Leopold sighed with relief. It wasn't Beckett. It was a face he'd never seen before.

Relieved, Leopold straightened up while Connie handcuffed the fallen man and he went to examine the red motorcycle resting on its side. The saddlebags yielded the loot from the latest robbery, a thick wad of small bills. That was when he noticed the paint scraped off the cycle's rear fender. There were little specks of blue in the scrape.

"Well, it looks like we've put a finish to the clown bandit," Connie said.

Leopold was still staring at the motorcycle. It couldn't be. He'd spent his whole career belittling happenstance and coincidence. And yet coincidences did happen.

"What's the matter, Captain?" Connie asked.

"Nothing," he replied, running his tongue over dry lips. A patrol car had pulled up beside them and another was coming down the street with its siren on. "Connie, I think I've just solved the murder of Gilbert Fez."

Raymond Oates had phoned Anna to tell her he'd be staying overnight, until after Sandy's arraignment and the posting of bail. He'd taken a room at a downtown hotel near police headquarters, and at midnight he was sitting in front of the television set, drained of all emotion, not really seeing the flickering images on the screen before him.

He had tried to help his daughter, to always do the right thing for her, and it had led to a murder charge. What could he do now? What could he do to keep Sandy out of prison?

He realized someone was knocking on the door and wondered how long they'd been there. He tried to remember if he'd ordered anything from room service, but when he opened the door it was Captain Leopold and the police woman he worked with.

"I was just going to bed," he stammered.

"Sorry," Leopold told him. "It couldn't keep till morning."

"Is it about Sandy?"

"Yes. We may be able to drop the charges against her."

It was like a terrible weight lifting from his shoulders. "That's great! What happened?"

"We found the real killer. You just have to do one thing for us."

"Anything at all?"

"Sign a confession that you murdered Gilbert Fez."

"I—?" Oates reached out to support himself against the dresser.

"You see, Mr. Oates, there was an amazing coincidence in this case, involving both the killer and a robber who's been active in our city. We arrested the bandit tonight—an unemployed machinist named Thomas Bittle. He rode his red motorcycle to and from the robberies, using a crash helmet to hide his clown disguise. During the robberies the makeup in turn distracted witnesses from his jeans and leather jacket, and no one thought of a motorcyclist until—"

"What does this have to do with Sandy and me?"

"The red-paint scrape on your car, where you said you hit a parked motorcycle—it matches a scrape on the fender of the bandit's cycle, and there are flecks of blue paint in it that'll match your car. You see, Mr. Oates, the bandit's motorcycle was parked, by coincidence, in front of Gilbert Fez's apartment a block from the robbery scene. You hit it as you were pulling away from the scene last night, just after you murdered Fez."

"I was at home!" he insisted, but the resistance was draining from his body.

"It's only an hour's drive across the state line. You could have driven here, killed Fez, and returned home by midnight, before your wife even missed you. The lab examination of those paint scrapes will prove you were here, Mr. Oates, and there's more besides. The angle of the wounds indicate the killer was left-handed. Sandy is left-handed, but that's sometimes inherited. You wear your watch on your right wrist. You're left-handed too, aren't you, Mr. Oates?"

"Yes," he admitted quietly.

"I eliminated another likely suspect, Cynthia Donovan, when I saw she'd unlocked the apartment door with the key in her right hand. But there was something else besides your left-handedness that I couldn't help noticing. When we arrived at Fez's building this morning, you led the way to his apartment at the rear of the first floor even though I hadn't

told you where it was. You knew its location because you'd been there before, when you killed him."

"He was ruining Sandy's life with drugs," Raymond Oates said. "He had to be stopped. God, I never knew Sandy was asleep behind that screen! I never knew she'd be blamed!"

"Come along, Mr. Oates."

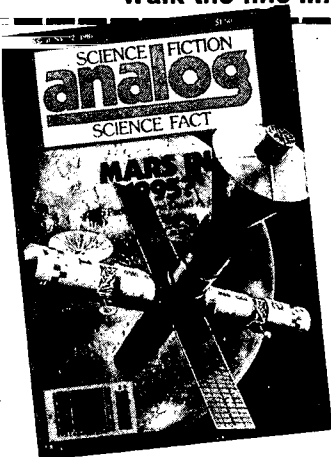
"I was going to confess if the jury convicted her. I never would have let her go to prison. You've got to believe that."

"We believe it," Connie said. "Come along now."

On the way to headquarters Oates heard Leopold say to her, "See what I meant by coincidence, Connie? A killer and a clown, who just happened to scrape fenders."



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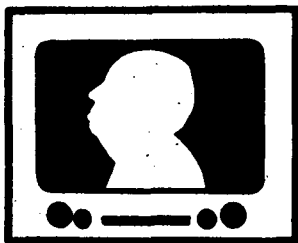
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THE KILLER AND THE CLOWN

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CRIME ON SCREEN

by Peter Christian

The Howling opens on a very contemporary note. A determined woman newscaster prowls the combat zone of downtown Los Angeles for a dangerous story. The electronic descendent of newshens from Nelly Bly to Torchy Blane—we discussed the woman reporters of melodrama in a recent COS—on-camera correspondent Karen West (Dee Wallace) is wired for sound, tracked by her newsteam and the cops, as she keeps an appointment in the back booths of a sleazy shop to interview a mysterious attacker who has terrorized the city. Every caution has been taken for her safety and yet she feels very vulnerable. As well she should, for things go awry and Karen comes face to face with horror. So *The Howling* begins.

Based on the novel by Gary Brandner, the film explores in untraditional terms lycanthropy in a modern city, how a society of were-creatures can coexist within normal society, appear ordinary, and even think of themselves as the superior beings, undetectable until they alter their shapes to stalk us. This unique slant to a familiar movie genre makes *The Howling* engrossing and entertaining. We enter this repellant yet fascinating netherworld through the terrified eyes of reporter Karen in settings as contrasting as inner-city dives and a sensitivity spa in the lush Mendocino forests of Northern California, where an urbane but threatening psychiatrist (Patrick Macnee) talks vaguely about usefully channelling hostilities. Can Karen believe her eyes when she witnesses a man in front of her change into *something else*? Why are her friends all disappearing about

her? All these questions are answered with far less hoke than you might imagine. Indeed, the film has some genuine thrills, and even charm.

Much of the visual chills are the responsibility of special-effects artist Rob Bottin, whose grisly bone-stretching transformations are imaginative and original. (Unlike all his predecessors, Bottin used no stop-motion photography in his process.) Overall, however, the film's dash and style are largely the work of its young director, Joe Dante, who—equally adept at editing, directing, and writing—is very much a total filmmaker.

Dante graduated from Hollywood's hardest film school: working on the low-budget movies of Roger Corman, an invaluable training ground for learning every facet of telling stories swiftly and well. New World was a studio "where one learned by doing," by coping, Dante told COS recently. "You literally couldn't waste a minute, so if one way of doing a scene did not work out you quickly tried to do it another way. The whole art of telling good stories seems to be lost today. Hollywood right now seems just a setting for drugs and deals. Where is Harry Cohn now that we need him?" (Cohn was the despotic president of Columbia Pictures who turned out a steady stream of movies from a modestly sized studio.) Dante is a mystery-film enthusiast and movie historian, expert on the great thrillers of the past. But while *The Howling* incorporates brief clips from Lon Chaney, Jr.'s *The Wolf Man* as homage, it is not imitative.

"We did a lot of research into the ancient folklore of the werewolf," Dante explains, "and we were surprised to learn that so much of the information we automatically accept as fact was just the myth of previous movies. Don't misunderstand me. I've always loved the way movies handled werewolves, but the point is, we've already seen the old way. It's time for something new."

Some of the old films of the genre still have the power to enchant. Variants of the were-creature theme go as far back as the silent versions of the Dr. Jekyll-Mr. Hyde story, in which the feral transformations were chemically induced. The first important use of the theme in the sound era was Universal's ground-breaking *Werewolf of London* (1935). The opening of the film was especially memorable. An English botanist, Wilfred Glendon (Henry Hull), is searching the wilds of Tibet for a flower, the Marifasa Lupina, reputed to bloom in this region only under the rays of the moon. While encamping on a mist-shrouded plateau he is savaged by a mysterious animallike creature but manages to drive it away. Once back in London, to his horror, he turns into a howling man-beast during

the full moon, rushing out into the poor sections of the city to kill by night.

Our hero is repulsed by this newly unbridled dark side—an agony which will become traditional in films of this genre. Also, it appears someone else knows his secret. He is visited by a sinister oriental scientist, Dr. Yogami (played to the hilt by Warner Oland, in the same years that great actor was portraying kindly Charlie Chan elsewhere), who was in Tibet when Glendon was there and hints at knowing everything. (“Remember this, Dr. Glendon, the werewolf instinctively seeks to kill the thing it loves the best.”) The only antidote for the murderous condition is the flowers of the rare Tibetan Marifasa plant Glendon has managed to bring back with him. It doesn’t unduly surprise us that the plant is quickly stolen and that Yogami is the creature that had attacked Glendon on that fogbound plateau. A struggle between the two were-creatures begins in the dark streets of London, with Glendon ultimately killing his adversary. (It is interesting to note how movie “magic” transformed Hull: during his first changing he is seen walking behind a series of columns, and as he passes each column he becomes progressively more beastly.) Finally, just as he is about to turn on his young wife, he is shot down by the police. Dying, and reverting, he gasps, “Thanks for the bullets. It’s better this way. In a few minutes now I shall know why this had to be.”

An essentially decent man unwittingly visited by a terrible curse unleashing the dormant violence within him—no one illustrated this vision of the were-creature better than Lon Chaney, Jr., making his major-film screen debut in Universal’s big-budget *The Wolf Man* (1941). As the son of Claude Rains, returning to his ancestral English estate after years in Canada, Larry Talbot is enormously sympathetic, totally undeserving of his fate. One dark night after a village fair, he comes to the rescue of a girl attacked by a dark creature. He kills the creature but is bitten. The next morning a gypsy (Bela Lugosi) is found dead. The gypsy’s mother, an old crone named Maleva (Maria Ouspenskaya), seeks him out not out of rancor—for he has “released” her son—but to warn that he now walks a thorny path. *Even though a man is pure at heart and says his prayers at night, he may become a wolf when the wolfbane blooms and the moon is full and bright.* She is the only one who can soothe Talbot’s torment, but they both know death is the only solution. We are told by Maleva that a werewolf can be destroyed only by “a silver stick, a silver bullet, a silver cane.” Finally Lord Talbot (Rains) unwittingly kills his own son with a silver-encrusted wolf’s-head cane.

Chaney played the tortured Talbot so well he was resurrected several times, while other studios made their own contributions to the genre. One of the best was *The Undying Monster* (1942), based on the gothic novel by Jessie Kerruish and set on the vast stony moor sets originally constructed by Twentieth Century-Fox for *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. In this period thriller, set like *Hound* in Victorian times, we don't know the identity of the werewolf until near the end, making it a whodunit as well.

England's Hammer Studio grappled with the subject as well. *The Curse of the Werewolf* (1961) featured Oliver Reed in a dynamic retelling of Guy Endore's period *Werewolf of Paris*. Reed was extraordinarily good as a young man born on Christmas Eve (prime werewolf material, according to folklore!), struggling to subdue the blood lusts that turn him into a nocturnal beast. Closer to our own decade, *The Werewolf of Washington* (1974) had its nice young hero, Dean Stockwell, assistant to the President of the United States and in love with the latter's daughter, bitten while on a Balkan mission and running amuck in Georgetown and elsewhere.

Cinema lycanthropes have been somewhat dormant in recent years but now are stirring. Fast on the heels of *The Howling* comes *The Wolfen*, based on the bestseller by Whitley Streiber, about a pack of superintelligent wolflike creatures lurking in New York's abandoned slum buildings, striking out against the race of man. When two cops are found mutilated a police detective—played by Albert Finney, who came out of retirement because of the script—begins a singleminded pursuit of murderers who are not human. As well, young director John Landis' *An American Werewolf in London* will shortly be released, promising to be a thriller in which likeable people are caught in a vortex of terror—and the first film to show a man transformed into a four-footed wolf on screen.

Silver bullets, the Marifasa flower—these are the inventions of the cinema for combating lycanthropy, one of man's oldest legends. *The Howling* and the pack of films it leads explore other solutions in our struggles against the wolf, a relatively harmless, wise beast with many human social traits which has, strangely enough, been (in the words of *Wolfen* director Michael Wadleigh) "for a long time a symbol of all that is evil to European man."

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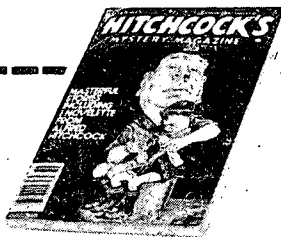
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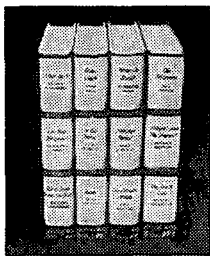
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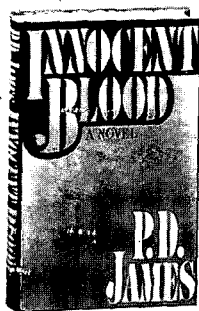
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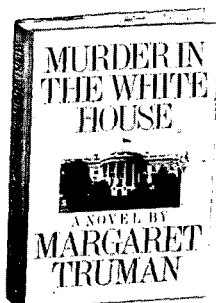
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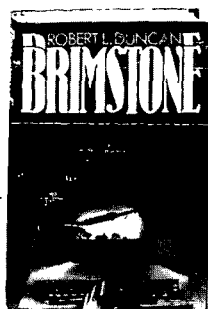
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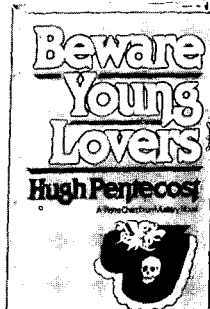
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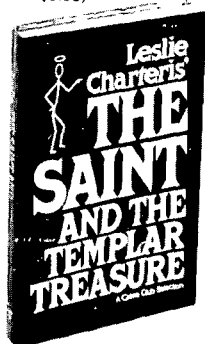
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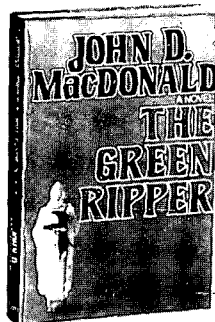
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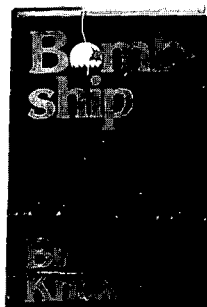
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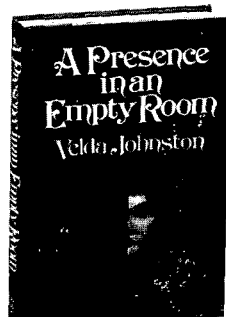
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